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October soldier, portrait of the week by Bahgory 14



Heading for a hig

SUNDAY night sees the opening in Luxor of what has been heralded as the most spectacular production ever of Verdi's *Aida*. The production, directed by Attilio Colonnello, is sponsored by Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, and is intended to celebrate the 125th anniversary of *Aida*'s premiere in Cairo and the 75th anniversary of the discovery of the Tomb of King Tutankhamum, writes **Nevine El-Aref.**

The opera, celebrating the doomed love between an Ancient Egyptian conqueror and an Ethiopian slave girl, was commissioned from Verdi by the Khedive Ismail, and was originally intended to be the jewel in the crown of the lavish celebrations that marked the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Unfortunately Verdi, initially reluctant to accept the commission, delivered the score of his masterpiece late, and so the premiere, in the khedive's newly-built opera house in Ezbekiya, was delayed.

The meticulously planned Luxor production, which will be staged in front of the 3,000-year-old Temple of Queen Hatshepsut on the West Bank of the Nile opposite Luxor, is unlikely to meet with such delays, with the logistics of the lavish staging having been worked out months before.

Officials hope that the LE15 million production will attract a record number of visitors to Luxor, and in anticipation of the expected crowds a temporary theatre seating 5,000 has been constructed and a new lighting system installed along the road leading to the temple.

According to Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni, the six nights of performances between 12-17 October constitute a "most important artistic event, reflecting the glory of Egyptian civilisation".

Ensuring that the months of preparation do not fall flat, the world's leading Verdi sopranos, Aprile Milo and Velhelmnia Fernandez, will share the title role, while tenors Guiseppe Giaccomini and Walter Fraccaro will play Radames, Aida's lover. The soloists will be accompanied by the Cairo Opera Orchestra, Choir and Ballet. (see p.3)

photo: Sherif Sonbol

'Mossad threatens anarchy'

Mossad's attempt to assassinate a Hamas official in Amman threatens anarchy in international relations, warned President Mubarak. **Nevine Khalil** *reports from Ismailia*

President Hosni Mubarak said yesterday Israel's failed attempt to assassinate a political official of the Islamist Hamas movement in Amman was an "immoral" act that could result in anarchy in international relations.

Speaking to reporters in Ismailia after a meeting with officers of the Second Army, Mubarak said: "What Israel did is immoral. For Israel to send Mossad agents to a sovereign and independent state, which is Jordan... this is utter anarchy."

Alluding to declarations by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu that he would pursue terrorism anywhere in the world, Mubarak said: "If every state did the same...this would undermine stability worldwide... This would not lead to peace."

Mubarak, who spoke by telephone on Tuesday night with Jordan's King Hussein, said he could not confirm whether Jordan and Israel had struck a deal under which Israel set free Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Hamas' spiritual leader, and other Palestinian prisoners, in order to secure the release of two Mossad agents arrested following the attack in Amman.

"King Hussein has his own circumstances," Mubarak said. "I cannot discuss the circumstances that forced him to take this action [release the two agents]. He takes the decision which he believes is in his country's best interest."

The two agents carried Canadian passports. Mubarak, asked about press reports that other agents used forged Egyptian passports, responded: "If this was confirmed, it would be a very serious matter and we would take measures. But there is no evidence. However, if [forged] passports are being used, this would be... a major challenge to international law. The world should not keep silent on this."

Mubarak quashed speculation that he planned to pardon Azam Azam, an Israeli of Druze origin, who was sentenced in Cairo to 15 years imprisonment after a State Security Court found him guilty of spying. "The court handed down its decision," Mubarak said. "The law does not give me the right [to pardon him]. I only issue pardons for groups...I do not issue a pardon for a specific individual. President Sadat never did it, and neither did President Nasser."

Mubarak also denied US news reports that Egypt had handed Libyan dissident Mansour Al-Kekhia, who disappeared in Cairo in December 1993, to the Libyan authorities. He said an investigation into the mystery had been launched at the time "but now they are raising the matter again, for the sake of Azam and others. If they have new evidence, they should come forward with it and we will present it to the prosecutor general. But to level accusations without evidence is wrong. And even if we had turned him over, which we did not, we would have had the right to do so. We turned 30 people to Israel voluntarily... and to America one person."

Alluding to the recent defection of the North Korean ambassador in Cairo, who sought refuge in the US, Mubarak said: "When the Korean ambassador left Egypt, he did not leave via the airport or the harbour. The CIA knows how he left. I am afraid that they too might have got the other man [Kekhia] out."

Asked about reports of a proposed four-way summit grouping Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians, Mubarak responded: "There is a proposal to this effect from Yasser Arafat. But a four-way summit must have a foundation. We should know in advance what we and Israel will be doing after the summit? For any summit [to succeed], it should be known in advance what it will achieve. If we don't know what it will produce, then there is no need for it." (see p.2)

Gujral visit

INDIAN Premier Inder Kumar Gujral arrives in Cairo tomorrow for a two-day visit, during which he will have separate meetings with President Hosni Mubarak and Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri.

Gujral is also scheduled to meet Foreign Minister Amr Moussa and Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid as well as members of the 1,400-strong Indian community in Egypt.

Top of the agenda will be bilateral relations, especially economic and trade issues, tourism, and the review of agreements signed between the two countries.

INSIDE

Affirming peace credentials

Arafat and Netanyahu met for the first time in eight months yesterday, signalling a possible thaw in the crisis in the peace process

US special envoy Dennis Ross said the surprise summit early yesterday between Binyamin Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat marked a "new beginning" in efforts to save the peace process, while stressing that major differences still remained between the two sides.

The Israeli prime minister and the Palestinian leader held more than two hours of talks before dawn at the Erez crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip. The meeting was unannounced and neither Arafat nor Netanyahu appeared before the press.

"I think they saw this as a new beginning between the leaders and indeed a new beginning for the [peace] process," Ross told reporters afterwards.

In their first meeting in eight months, Arafat and Netanyahu revived their commitment to "peace with security" and agreed to meet "on a regular basis," Ross said. "They are really trying to push for a new beginning and to create a new impetus and new urgency not just to have a [peace] process but also to begin to produce results."

"It was a very good meeting in which both of them reaffirmed their commitment to work together, to overcome all problems and all differences," Ross added.

Israeli sources said the two sides agreed to resume the high-level talks, suspended following a series of suicide bombings in Jerusalem in July and September, on combating terrorism.

Marwan Kanafani, Arafat's spokesman, told AFP the meeting had covered "all topics... including a halt to settlements, the redeployments and the causes of the halt in the peace process." A senior Palestinian official said, however, that there were no breakthroughs on these issues, a failure acknowledged by Ross.

"There shouldn't be any illusions, there is a lot of work to be done, a lot of differences to be overcome," the American envoy said.

Ross returned to the region on Monday for the resumption of negotiations on implementing interim commitments under which Israel should release Palestinian prisoners and permit the opening of an airport and a harbour in Gaza and a passage between Gaza and the West Bank.

Ross said low-level talks would continue "with some intensity" and that he planned a second visit to the region next week to follow up on the talks. But a planned meeting on Monday in Washington between Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and Arafat's deputy Mahmoud Abbas to discuss broader issues such as settlements and troop withdrawals has been pushed back until the end of the month due to a series of Jewish holidays.

Yesterday's surprise summit capped the dramatic series of events that followed the botched Israeli attempt to assassinate a Hamas official in Amman two weeks earlier. Two Israeli agents were arrested following the attack and Netanyahu, forced to drop his hard-line policy, freed Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, and other Palestinian prisoners, in order to obtain their release.

The affair, which nearly precipitated a breakdown in relations with Jordan's King Hussein, cast serious doubts on Netanyahu's sincerity in pursuing the peace process.

Press reports quoted US officials as saying Netanyahu sought the meeting with Arafat in an attempt to reaffirm his peace credentials and to insist that, despite Israel's decision to release Sheikh Yassin, he still expected the Palestinian Authority to crack down on Hamas militants.

Yassin returned to his Gaza home by helicopter from Amman on Monday and was welcomed by a 15,000-strong crowd at the Yarmouk Stadium.

Amid a forest of Palestinian and green Islamist banners, they listened as Yassin urged Palestinians to be "one hand." He added: "There are no differences between right and left or big and small. We are one people. Therefore, I send my regards to Yasser Arafat who has struggled hard to provide his people with freedom and independence."

Talks offer

JORDAN's King Hussein said yesterday that the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) offered to open a dialogue with Israel just two days before Mossad agents tried to assassinate a leader of the group in Amman on 25 September.

Addressing a public rally in Amman, Hussein said that he sent a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu "to tell him that there is a possibility for a dialogue between Hamas and you to stop terrorism and violence." Hussein said he had also expressed his willingness to intervene to launch that dialogue, but he added, "they (Israel) say the letter did not arrive there on time... and what happened, happened" he said, referring to the failed attempt against the life of the head of the Hamas politburo in Jordan, Khaled Misha'al.

Also confirming reports which were earlier denied by Jordanian officials, King Hussein said Netanyahu and two Israeli cabinet ministers visited Jordan to resolve the crisis four days after the attack on Misha'al.

Reports on a Hamas offer to stop the violence against Israel were circulated hours before Hussein's speech in Amman, but were immediately denied by Hamas officials. "The report of this so-called message [offering a cease-fire] is only a Zionist invention aiming to rescue Netanyahu from the crisis after the failed operation [against Misha'al]" said a Hamas statement faxed to news agencies early yesterday. (see p.4)

Peace in danger on war's anniversary

As the nation celebrated the anniversary of the 1973 October War, President Mubarak warned that the Middle East peace process was in grave danger. **Nevine Khalil** reports

In a radio and television broadcast to the nation on Sunday, President Hosni Mubarak blamed the stalemate in Middle East peace-making on "deficient policies which lack a rational vision of the future and the absence of a clear and honest commitment to the signed agreements." Although Mubarak did not mention Binyamin Netanyahu by name, his words were an obvious criticism of the policies and actions of the Israeli Prime Minister.

Mubarak made the broadcast to mark the 24th anniversary of the 1973 October War. In that war, Mubarak served as air force commander and was credited with coordinating a surprise strike by 200 warplanes against Israeli positions in the Sinai Desert. The air strike was followed by troops taking the Suez Canal by storm.

In his address to the nation, Mubarak warned that the peace process "is threatened by immense dangers" and called on all parties to work hard for the resumption of negotiations. He said that unless "consolidated efforts are made by all parties to save the stagnant peace process, the future appears to be in great peril, and the potential harm is incalculable." He added that Egypt has a "special responsibility" for maintaining balance and security in the region, because the alternative is "difficult and frightening".

Mubarak said there were "grave concerns" over the continued lack of trust between the concerned parties, adding that feelings of despair and frustration were growing among the peoples of the region, especially the Palestinians and Israelis. These, he said, were the result of acts of violence against civilians, as well as of "the exaggerated response to these acts, [namely] closures and mass starvation". He said that such policies "weaken the moderate and peace-loving forces on both sides, in favour of the extremist, violent and terrorist groups."

Alluding to American and European efforts to break the deadlock, Mubarak said: "We attach great hope to the honest and constructive efforts undertaken by friendly world powers [...] to help the peace process out of the current crisis by assuming the role of an active partner." He also called on all parties to "cooperate earnestly so as to restart negotiations on all tracks as soon as possible."

Mubarak advised that the best way to confront the forces that are opposed to peace is to fight violence and terrorism and to show an honest commitment to signed agreements and respect for partners in the process, "because peace is a joint responsibility based on an agreement between equal partners who are committed to the principles of peace."

Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, six years after the October War, becoming the first Arab country to do so. Mubarak said that without this "umbrella of peace", efforts to develop and reform Egypt's economy would not have been possible. "We have come a long way on the road to progress," he said, "but our success hangs on our ability to protect the peace process from its enemies."

Mubarak applauded the late President Anwar El-Sadat's "brave decision" to go to war, putting an end to the volatile "no peace-no war" situation that had prevailed until then. He also praised Sadat's "historic initiative which gave the war a clear and noble target, namely a peace based on justice which provides security for all parties".

Sadat was assassinated in 1981 by Islamist militants as he reviewed a military parade celebrating the war's eighth anniversary.

Mubarak said the October war shattered "the myth of Israeli supremacy" and showed the world that the Arabs cannot be defeated "as long as their ranks are united and their will is of iron". More importantly, he continued, it opened the way for peace negotiations because it proved that military action "was not the best way to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict". Mubarak said security can only be achieved through "objective dialogue and mutual trust."

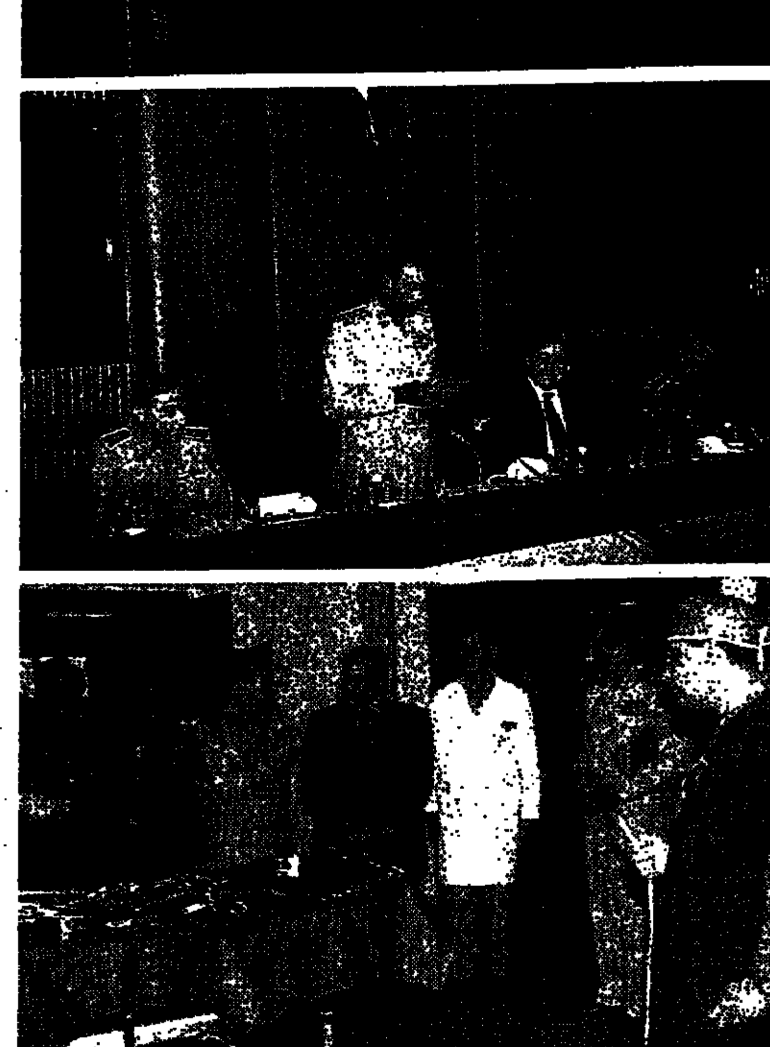
Mubarak inaugurated the celebrations by placing wreaths of flowers on the tomb of the Unknown Solider, as well as on the graves of the late presidents Sadat and Gamal Abdel-Nasser. Sadat is credited not only with launching the war at a time when nobody thought Egypt was capable of taking on such an opponent, but also with making peace with Israel. Nasser, for his part, was responsible for taking on the enormous task of rebuilding Egypt's military strength following the 1967 defeat.

Mubarak, as part of the celebrations, also chaired a meeting of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. He reviewed the political situation in the region and Egypt's regional and international efforts to push the peace process forward. He also talked about his memories as an air force officer during the 1968-69 war of attrition and his work as air force commander during the 1973 war.

In the evening, Mubarak and the First Lady rounded off the day by attending a performance of an operetta celebrating the war, entitled "October of the Arabs".

On Tuesday, Mubarak inaugurated a high-tech military hospital and media centre. The Armed Forces Medical Compound boasts an advanced toxic treatment centre, and the latest in surgical and therapeutic equipment. An estimated 30 per cent of the compound's medical services will be accessible to civilians. At the Military Media Centre, Mubarak witnessed the launching of Egypt's armed forces site on the Internet. Egypt's military home page is the 30th to go on line and the centre has access to 39 radio stations, 35 television networks, eight wire services and dozens of Arab and foreign newspapers.





Celebrating the Sixth of October War, President Mubarak placed wreaths of flowers on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, as well as on the graves of the late presidents Sadat and Abdel-Nasser. He also chaired a meeting of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and inaugurated a high-tech military hospital and media centre

'Evil unleashed'

Foreign Minister Moussa has warned that the Israeli government's apparent determination to continue assassination attempts against its enemies could trigger a vicious cycle of violence across the region. **Dina Ezzat** reports

Egypt on Tuesday condemned Mossad's failed attempt to assassinate a Hamas official in Amman and said Israeli declarations that similar operations would continue could spell the end of regional peace and security.

In a deal, struck between Jordan and Israel, Amman turned over to Israel two Mossad agents who had been arrested after making an abortive attempt on the life of Khaled Mesha'al, a Hamas political officer based in the Jordanian capital. In return, Israel freed Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the organisation's founder and spiritual leader, as well as 22 Jordanian and Palestinian prisoners.

"The attempt on the life of Khaled Mesha'al, carried out in Amman by Mossad agents, is a very serious matter," Moussa said.

He also described as "very alarming" the "official Israeli statements affirming the intention of the Israeli government to continue such terrorist operations across the region."

The foreign minister warned that this policy would only serve to trigger further attacks by militant groups, ushering in a cycle of violence that "forebodes great evil" and will have a negative impact on "regional security and thus on the peace process itself".

Israel's declared intentions, warned Moussa, cannot but complicate relations between the states of the region. This, he said, "will make it impossible to push the peace process forward. The efforts that are being made to salvage this process will be doomed to failure".

"The official Israeli statements that suggest their intention to continue their involvement in assassination attempts could only lead to a serious deterioration of the situation," Moussa said.

All regional governments, Moussa asserted, should refrain from involving themselves in such actions as well as in any resulting under-the-table deals.

"No government that has any self-respect could accept what has been going on," said Moussa.

The Egyptian stance on security arrangements, according to the nation's top diplomat, is to establish close cooperation between the different parties concerned. "Security issues should be dealt with in the context of proper coordination between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority, but only within the framework of the signed agreements," he said.

"It would be a very risky business to open the way for governmental bodies to carry out terrorist attacks," said Moussa. He added, "Nobody should think that they will be able to contain this evil once it is unleashed".

Moussa suggested that the attempt on Mesha'al's life makes it clear that serious espionage operations are underway, "similar to those in which Azam Azam was involved".

Azam, an Israeli of Druze origin, was sentenced last month by an Egyptian State Security Court to 15 years imprisonment after he was convicted of spying.

In response to a question on the Egyptian reaction to news reports that some of the Mossad agents who carried out the attack against Mesha'al were travelling on forged Egyptian passports, the foreign minister said that an investigation was underway.

Moussa reacted cautiously to the resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, thanks to active US mediation, after a seven-month interruption. "It seems that there are attempts to either delay or water down [the content of] these talks," he said, alluding to a second round of talks scheduled for Monday in Washington.

What really counts, said Moussa, are not the formalities and "not the handshakes" between Israeli and Palestinian officials, but rather concrete results that match the terms of reference of the peace process.

He added: "What counts is to find answers to the questions of [Jewish] settlements and [Israeli] redeployment [in the West Bank]. But it should be made clear that the Arabs are not naive and that they will not accept a mere show of formalities".

Meanwhile, Egyptian diplomats have been involved in the Palestinian-Israeli talks that started earlier this week in the region.

According to Egyptian ambassador to Israel, Mohamed Bassiouni, Egypt is playing a central role in the meetings of the Palestinian-Israeli committees that are discussing the implementation of the interim agreement commitments, security issues, and the preparations for the convention of the final status talks. "We are not necessarily present in the meeting rooms, but we are always available for consultations and deliberations with the parties concerned," he explained.

Speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly* on the phone from his Tel Aviv office, Bassiouni did not exclude the possibility that Egypt might be present, "in one way or another", at the final status negotiations.

He said, "It is very clear now that the two parties, Palestinian and Israeli, are unable to deal with the issues on their own and that there have to be other parties present for things to move forward".

In this context Bassiouni said that Cairo did not exclude a potential high-level Egyptian participation in a Camp David style summit with Yasser Arafat and Binyamin Netanyahu, if it took place in the US, provided Israel is showing "maximum readiness" to honour its commitments under the Oslo Accords.

Camp David, a US presidential retreat in Maryland, was the scene of the 1978 summit that brought together then Egyptian and US Presidents Anwar El-Sadat and Jimmy Carter with Israeli Likud Prime Minister Menachem Begin. The three leaders agreed on two "frameworks", one for Egyptian-Israeli peace and one for peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. The first of these frameworks opened the way to the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. The second which included for the first time the concept of Palestinian self-antonomy, was rejected by the Palestinians at the time.

The idea of the summit is believe to have been floated during a visit last week by Israeli President Ezer Weizman to Alexandria that included talks with President Hosni Mubarak. Weizman who began a trip to Washington on Sunday is reportedly planning to discuss the proposal with President Bill Clinton.

"We are waiting to see what is going to happen on this front and then we will decide," said Bassiouni.

Promenade plans ditched

To the relief of shop-owners and motorists, a plan to expand a downtown pedestrians' promenade has been scrapped. **Gihan Shahine** reports

After cars and other vehicles were banished from El-Alfi Street in central Cairo to establish a promenade for pedestrians, sections of Ahmed Orabi and Talaat Harb streets were to be next. But Abdel-Rehim Shehata, the new governor of Cairo, has decided against enlarging the pedestrian area, fearing it would have a disastrous effect on the flow of traffic.

Word circulated that sections of the two streets would be closed to traffic after workers began digging to upgrade the infrastructure before re-paving the road for pedestrian use only. Shop and restaurant owners were alarmed, fearing the closure would dramatically affect sales, as was the case on El-Alfi Street. Motorists were also apprehensive.

The Cairo Governorate was confronted with two choices: either to close sections of the two streets completely to traffic or just enlarge the sidewalks. The latter option won the day.

The cancelled plan comprised the second and third stages of the promenade project. The first was completed a few weeks ago at a cost of LE3 million. A section of El-Alfi Street, between its intersections with Emadeddin Street and Orabi Square, was closed, as well as several connecting side-streets, such as Saray El-Azbakeya, Zakaria Ahmed and Saray El-Ismailia. These roads were covered with tiles and furnished with new lamp-posts, benches and plants.

Mohamed Abdel-Aziz, head of the roads and transport department at the Cairo Governorate, said the first stage was implemented only after a thorough study was made, proving that it would cause no traffic problems. "The section of El-Alfi Street that was closed has an alternative route, which is 26 July Street," said Mohamed El-Nazer, the Cairo traffic chief. "And the closed side-streets did not have much value for traffic since they were almost clogged by street vendors."

For shopkeepers and motorists, the cancellation of the second and third stages of the promenade project was good news. "We are relieved that the government made the right decision," said the owner of a petrol station near Orabi Square. "Closing a section of Orabi Street would have forced our station to shut down. Sales have dropped already by at least 60 per cent after the closure of El-Alfi Street."

In contrast, shopkeepers on El-Alfi Street are lamenting their fate. They say that sales have slumped and, along with residents, complain about the noise made by pedestrians until the early hours of the morning. Ahmed Gamaleddin, who owns a leather bag shop, said sales have dropped by 75 per cent. "Customers are keeping away because they are annoyed by the pedestrians and those sitting in cafés, doing nothing but harassing people," he said.

However, pedestrians are obviously happy. Every evening dozens of people are taking advantage of the newly pedestrianised streets to enjoy a stroll, window shop or just relax on the street benches.

Operation opera

Luxor has been given a face-lift in preparation for the opening of Verdi's *Aida*. **Nevine El-Aref** goes on a tour of a town with a mission to please

The city of Luxor has been putting on its glad rags in preparation for the opening Sunday night of what has been described as the most spectacular production ever of Verdi's *Aida*. "We are ready for the big event," said Mohamed Youssef, head of the city council. "Preparations, which began earlier this year, have now been completed."

The trees dotting the Nile corniche have been bedecked with lights. Flowers have been planted along the main streets. Even the horses drawing tourist carriages have been provided with pampers.

At a cost of LE6 million, Luxor airport has been expanded to include two new departure and arrival halls, each seating 2,000 passengers, instead of the original 200. The runways have been given a fresh coat of asphalt, to help them cope with the many flights that will be bringing in the *Aida* fans. Additional immigration officers have been assigned to the airport and female receptionists will be waiting to welcome the visitors with bouquets of flowers.

The LE15-million production will be staged in front of the 3,000-year-old Temple of Queen Hatshepsut on the west bank of the Nile opposite Luxor.

A 7-km-long road leading from the city to the new Luxor Bridge, which connects the east and west banks of the Nile, has been re-paved and furnished with a new lighting system. The road linking the city with the airport has also been spruced up for the occasion. A bridge has been built across the railway lines to keep traffic moving between the city and the airport, as well as between the city and the Qena and Red Sea provinces, and the Egyptian army has constructed a floating bridge over the Nile to provide preferential access to the west bank for performers and VIPs.

Emergency generators are in place to cope with any sudden power failure and ambulances and mobile clinics will be standing by to deal with any emergency during the six-night run, Youssef said. To improve security, 300 feddans of sugar-cane that used to grow along the roads leading to the venue have been razed to the ground. Sugar-cane plantations are well-known as a favourite hideout of Islamist militants. Farmers will be compensated at the rate of LE5,000 for each feddan, Youssef said.

To mark the occasion, four tombs in the Valley of Kings will be opened to the public for the first time. The house of British archaeologist Howard Carter, who discovered King Tutankhamun's tomb, now a museum, will also be open.

Officials hope that despite last month's bombing of a tourist bus in Cairo, the production will attract a record number of visitors. The impact of the 18 September attack, in which nine Germans were killed, is not yet clear, with travel agents providing conflicting reports about the situation.

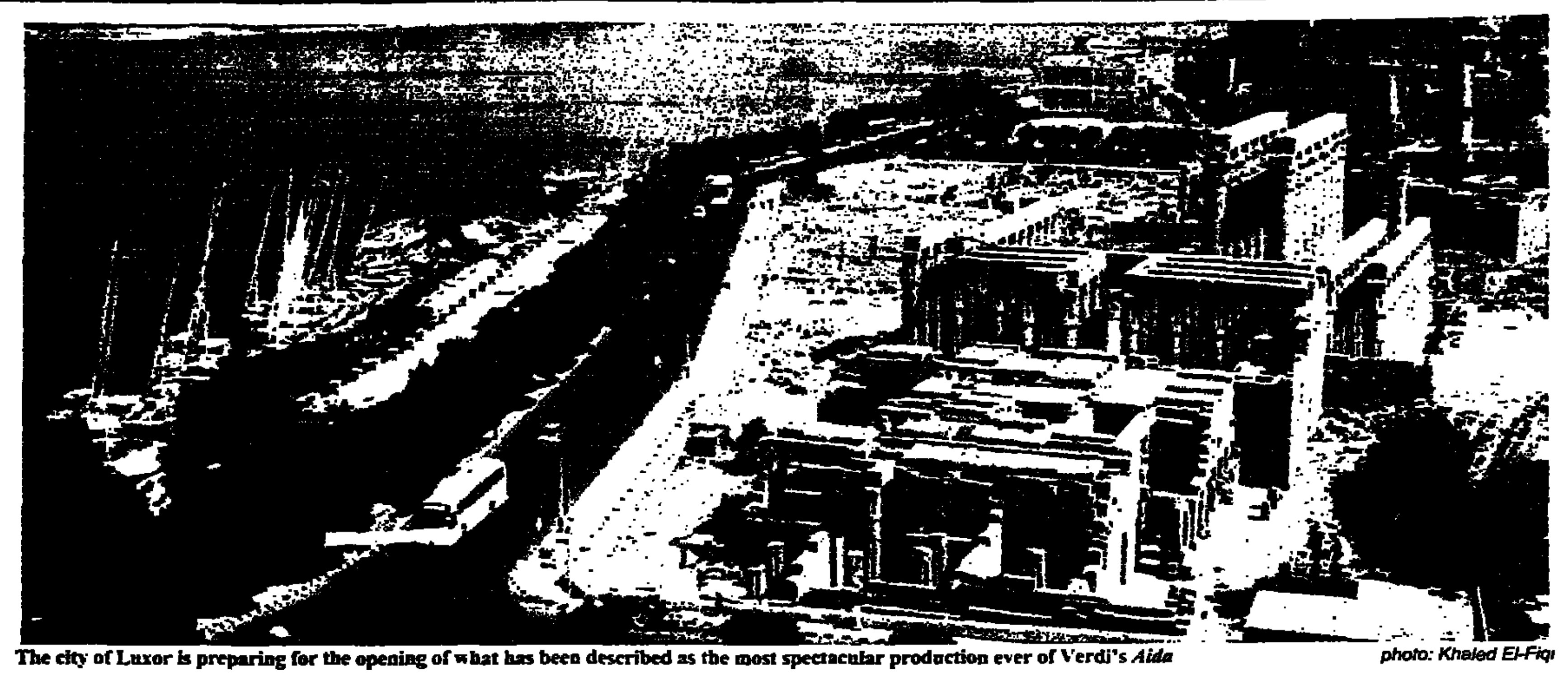
According to Hesham Naguib of Emeco Travel, cancellations since the bombing have been running at between three to five percent, though he did not think this was necessarily connected to the attack. "The cancellations so far are following the pattern seen for such performances in the past," he said.

Ahmed El-Arrif of Cheops Travel, however, painted a gloomier picture. "Ninety percent of our tourists are Germans and all of their reservations have been cancelled," he said.

Not so, responded Ayman Gad El-Rab of Hapi Tours, which deals exclusively with German tourists. "Our schedule is very busy and there have been no cancellations," he said. "For the coming month, we have between 15 and 20 German groups, who will be visiting Cairo, Luxor, Aswan and Hurghada."

Nader Rizkalla of Thomas Cook, Luxor, also said they had had no cancellations. "The bombing has had no impact whatsoever on our work," he said, pointing out that 90 per cent of their clients were British and French tourists.

Ibrahim El-Dessouki, assistant front office manager at the Luxor Sheraton, said that it was too early to make a correct assessment of the impact of the bombing. He explained that tourists visiting Egypt between now and the beginning of January would have made their Luxor reservations two or three months earlier. "They cannot cancel now because their money will not be re-funded," he said. The situation will become clear by the end of January or beginning of February, Dessouki added.



The city of Luxor is preparing for the opening of what has been described as the most spectacular production ever of Verdi's *Aida* photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

A river with a view

The government has launched a campaign to remove what it describes as encroachments on the Nile in Cairo and Giza. **Gihan Shahine** assesses the reaction

Walking by the banks of the Nile in certain sections of Cairo and Giza, one could hardly see the river from behind an endless line of cafeterias, clubs, houseboats, plant nurseries and other, mostly illegal, constructions. Strollers who cannot afford the expense of having drinks in the so-called Nile-side "casinos," have to sit on stone benches along the sidewalk if they need a rest. But their vision of the river, more often than not, is hampered by one encroachment or another.

For Nile-lovers, the government campaign to remove the encroachments in Cairo and Giza was welcome news. "The Nile is not open to us, the public," said a passer-by. "How can a simple employee like me with three children afford the high prices of the cafeterias located all along the Corniche, blocking the view of the Nile? Some of them even use the sidewalk as an extension to their businesses."

Municipal authorities in Cairo and Giza have given the trespassers one year to move from the area or comply with the Nile protection code. The government will no longer grant licences for building on, or occupying, any part of the river banks. Only Nile cruisers and their dockyards will continue to be licensed. Unless the trespassers respond within that period, their establishments will be demolished at their own expense.

Setting a precedent, Cairo Governor Abdel-Rehim Shehata has ordered the removal of a building previously used by his deputy for blocking the Nile view.

The campaign, launched at the orders of Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, is being implemented by the Cairo and Giza governors, the agriculture minister and the minister of public works and water resources.

According to official statistics, there are 347 encroachments in Cairo alone, including cafeterias, clubs, plant nurseries and dockyards, covering an area of 586,000 square metres. About 200 of these encroachments block the Nile view.

The offenders include seven military clubs, 13 private clubs, six mosques and a church. The government owns 31 of the violating establishments. Nearly 200 encroachments were reported in Giza.

Mohamed El-Moayyad, head of West Cairo Municipality, attributed the large number of violations to the lack of coordination among various government departments. "The division of authority has opened the way to many violations," El-Moayyad said. "We have sent warnings to all these trespassers and are keeping the situation under close watch."

Agriculture Minister Youssef Wali has stated that once the encroachments are removed, their sites will be converted into public parks.

But what is a construction violation to the government could be home to some people, like the residents of houseboats, or a source of livelihood for others, like the owners of plant nurseries and *felukas*.

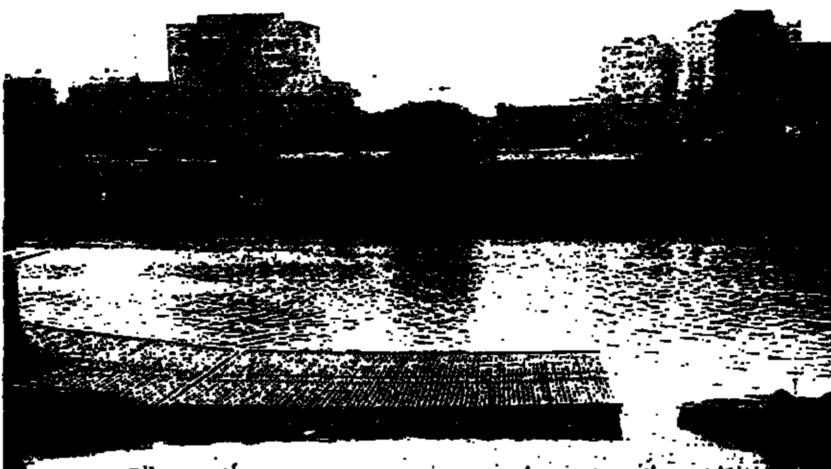
"This is a roof over our heads. They cannot just throw us out," said Ali Ahmed El-Kordi, who lives with his large family in a Zamalek house-boat. "Even if we can afford another residence, what about those poor families crammed in houseboats in Imbaba?"

According to El-Kordi, the owners of houseboats were asked by municipal authorities to obtain new licences and prove that their boats are properly maintained and do not pollute the Nile. This is nearly impossible, he said, because the government department issuing such licences has not been designated yet. "We are completely at a loss," El-Kordi complained.

"Houseboats are part of the Egyptian folk culture and also promote tourism," said Ann Tiernan, an Irish teacher who lives on a houseboat. "We do understand the government's concept of protecting the Nile and opening it to the public, but houseboats and plant nurseries do not mar the view of the Nile or cause any damage to it."

Plant nursery owners and workers are also worried that they may be forced to leave. Hussein El-Sayed, a worker at a plant nursery, said he had nowhere else to go if the nursery was closed down. "My family would starve if we were forced to leave," he said. The owners of most plant nurseries insisted that they have licences that are automatically renewed.

"We got a permit to use this piece of land by the Nile as a plant nursery nearly 20 years ago and the licence is automatically renewed," said an owner who asked that his name be withheld. "This campaign came as a shock to all of us because plant nurseries add to the beauty of the Nile and do not pose any threat. The piece of land we are using was previously a rubbish dump."



Illegal constructions block the Nile view photo: Salah Ibrahim

Peasant rumblings, but no revolt

A law liberalising agricultural land rents which took full effect at the beginning of this month has provoked some isolated incidents of violence, but there are no signs yet of the predicted peasants' revolt. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

Following a five-year grace period, a 1992 law liberalising agricultural land rents took full effect on 1 October, leading to some incidents of violence and many arrests. But contrary to the warnings issued by the opposition parties, there was no sign of a "peasants' revolt". Nor have there been mass evictions of tenant farmers, many of whom have lived on rented land for generations.

According to the Land Centre for Human Rights, six people were killed and 40 wounded in the village of Hiwa in the southern province of Qena when police attempted to evict a tenant farmer. In the village of Al-Rifa'a, also in Qena province, four people were killed, 61 wounded and 150 arrested in skirmishes with police forces, also attempting to enforce an eviction order. The Centre put the total casualty toll from violence relating to the law at 25 killed and 210 wounded. They also said that about 1,000 people have been arrested. They include several members of the leftist Tagammu and Islamist-oriented Labour parties, as well as Ezzeddin Naguib, the 57-year-old artist and manager of El-Ghouri Cultural Palace. Naguib was remanded in custody for 15 days for allegedly using the Palace's photocopying machine to print literature protesting against the law.

But five Nasserist critics, including journalist Hamdein Sabahi, who were arrested this summer for encouraging resistance to the law, were set free one week before the law fully took effect.

Passed in June 1992, the law seeks to redress the injustice suffered by landowners, whose rental income had diminished substantially over the preceding 30 years, by raising rents from seven to 22 times the value of the land tax. After a five-year grace period that ended on 30 September, the rent ceiling was removed. Rents would now be determined entirely by "market forces", with no government regulation. The law provided for this grace period, so as to allow owners and tenants time to negotiate new rent contracts to the satisfaction of both parties.

Mahmoud Abu Gharib, chairman of the General Committee for Adjusting Landlord-Tenant Relationships at the Ministry of Agriculture, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that, during the grace period, the Committee had been able to renegotiate contracts equivalent to an area of 950,000 feddans out of the total of 1.1 million feddans that are subject to the law's jurisdiction.

"The area that is cultivated on a cash-rent basis has decreased from 24 per cent [of total cultivated acreage] in 1992 to 12 per cent at present," he said. "These are mostly small, fragmented plots of land, where relationships can be easily renegotiated. The delay is mainly due to the absence of landlords, most of whom live in the cities and towns."

At a meeting last week with provincial governors, Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri said that the proportion of contracts that had been successfully renegotiated ranged between 70 and 100 per cent in the various governorates. Governors, he said, have been instructed to spare no effort in re-adjusting those that are still outstanding. Ganzouri urged the opposition parties to "stop encouraging conflict and to cooperate with the government in re-adjusting the remaining relationships."

Karam Saber, director of the Land Centre, was sceptical. "Even if the government has succeeded in re-adjusting 90 per cent of the landlord-tenant relationships, this means that there are still 100,000 pieces of land for which new conditions have not been agreed," he said. "This means there are approximately 600,000 [tenants] willing to fight and die for their land."

For the past several months, the Tagammu, Nasserist and Labour parties have been waging a campaign against the law's implementation. They warned of widespread unrest, and even the possibility of a peasants' revolt, once the grace period expired.

The campaign targeted Agriculture Minister Youssef Wali, holding him responsible for what the opposition described as an attempt to restore "feudalism" in Egypt. Raafat Seif, a Tagammu member of the People's Assembly, questioned Wali's claim that tenants were either being provided with loans on easy terms to help them cope with the rent increases or offered alternative pieces of land in newly-reclaimed areas.

"The committees formed by the agricultural departments to settle disputes resulting from the new law have not come up with any solutions," Seif said. "A large number of farmers have been forced to agree to new contracts with dramatic rent hikes, ranging from LE1,500 to 2,500 per feddan annually."

Seif alleged that the Principal Bank for Development and Agricultural Credit has not offered a single loan on favourable terms to tenants wishing to buy the land they rented. "Not to mention that Wali's claim of providing alternative lands in newly-reclaimed areas is neither true nor acceptable to the tenants themselves," he said.

Wali, for his part, accused the opposition parties of lying and spreading false information about conditions in the countryside. "These parties claimed that they would collect the signatures of more than 1 million tenants who were allegedly affected negatively by the law," Wali said. "So far, they have not managed to collect even 1,000 signatures."

Abu Gharib said that a total of 11,269 tenants fearing eviction had submitted complaints to the "adjustment committees." "We investigated these complaints and found that only 976 of them were eligible for compensation," he said. "Around 300 will be provided with loans on easy terms, and the others will be compensated with land in newly-reclaimed areas."

Wali also insisted that the various incidents of violence that were reported were not related to the implementation of the law. "Rather, they are the product of differences which occur and recur in the countryside in all ages. Tenants, be they Muslim or Christian, are fully aware of the sanctity of property," he said.

Ahmed Abu Zeid, majority leader in the People's Assembly, told the *Weekly* that the law would be implemented smoothly, and that this would deal a major blow to the parties that had opposed it. "It will provide further evidence that these parties are fighting Quixotic battles, because they insist on clinging to obsolete ideologies," he said.

Additional reporting by ***Fatemah Farag***

'Those were the days' party?

Revolutions tend to breed nostalgia, if they achieve nothing else. But can nostalgia itself make good politics? **Fatemah Farag** ponders on the return of a generation

In the early 1970s, as the university students in Egypt, as virtually everywhere else, began to challenge the political system, they could hear Sheikh Imam singing the words of poet Ahmed Fouad Nigm: "the students have got it right once again." Today, some of the one time leaders of the left-wing led student revolts of the early '70s, self-styling themselves "the 70s generation", are striving to resurrect something of that collective involvement in the politics of their country to which they once gave so much of their lives. The quest, however, is no longer as straightforward as it may have seemed 25 years ago.

Then, they had the defeat of 1967 behind them as an emotional impulse, and the radicalism of 1968 to provide an intellectual framework. They were the critical voice raised against the failures of Nasserism. They were there to remind the regime that the battle with imperialism and Zionism had been fought — and lost. It was in this context that the radical nationalist student movement led by the left was able to constitute a veritable opposition block within the universities.

However, by the mid-to-late '70s, the "generation" was itself in crisis, due both to its internal political confusions and to the successful offensive against them mounted by President Anwar El-Sadat. Realising the radicals' potential as a political threat, Sadat deliberately strengthened the Islamist factions within the universities in order to reduce their impact.

Many years later, haunted by their heritage of conflict and defeat, cabined and confined within a claustrophobic political environment, and punished by the harsh realities of everyday life, the ranks of the '70s generation have now publicly split over the answer to that vexing question: What is to be done?

Two years ago the publishing house, Al-Mahrousa, owned by ex-student activist Farid Zahran, initiated a series of discussions, attended by members of the '70s generation. "We felt the time was right," Zahran said. "People suddenly started coming, and by mid-1996 I'd got the idea of organising a celebration for the '70s generation, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the students' uprising of January 1972."

The initiative culminated in the first meeting of the "Celebration of the '70s Generation" beginning on 21 February (International Students Day). "It was a very emotional occasion... many people had not seen each other for about 20 years... and then they began to discuss the future," Zahran remembers.

Approximately 800 people attended over the three days of the event. The majority of those present agreed to establish a "legal body" to represent them, namely a non-profit company which would be responsible for holding a yearly celebration, with a fund for the members and social activities, as well as seminars to debate urgent issues of the day.

A minority of activists criticised the "celebration" initiative, claiming it was all parade and no content, an empty imitation of politics. The real problems, however, only started later. "From the beginning people were attacking us... why the Mahrousa, why Farid they would ask? But that's normal, because in our political environment any form of collective action is viewed with scepticism... When people saw that we were really being democratic, they relaxed," Zahran said. "The real confrontation only began on 23 July."

The major point of contension has been the idea of setting up a political party. "We believe that the nation is in crisis. There are many signs of this ...terrorism, corruption, etc...We felt we could get together and fill in the political vacuum by founding an inclusive political party," explained Zahran. According to the document in which their plans are spelled out, one of the main aims behind the project is to articulate a "critique of the present political situation, without adopting rigid views which might exclude any particular current from taking part."

There has been much illuminating criticism of this particular suggestion. "They lack any unified thinking," according to Mohamed El-Sayed Said of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies: "To establish a new party, there should be new ideas and a programme that is different from those of the existing parties... The ideas of this group are both very general and very similar to those of both Tagammu and the Nasserists."

Salah Eissa, a leftist intellectual and member of Tagammu raised another valid point: "What does it mean for a generation to turn itself into a party? The '70s generation was made up of many different factions, including members of radical Islamist groups... This group [Zahran's] only represents one limited strand in that fabric."

Yet nostalgia for collective experience, for a time when today's middle-aged men and women believed they could make history by taking to the streets and leading throngs of students behind them, is proving a potent force. It binds together those who have never been able to break completely with the ideas and values they once held. Critics like Said understand the need felt by members of this generation to return to a sort of activism. "This is a generation of very loyal people who have a long history of personal sacrifice. Many of them did not start building a semblance of a personal life until the '80s," Said said. Nevertheless, he added, this need, however emotionally valid, is no substitute for fresh ideas or clear attitudes on crucial issues. "Even though I think they comprise some of the best intellectuals in this country, they have no new answers... The only thing that really brings these people together today are memories of their college days," he said.

However, Zahran contends that the whole point of the initiative is not to set pre-conceived goals or sign up to pre-determined ideas. He envisages, for example, a political party which can include both supporters and opponents of the new agricultural land rent law. "This is the kind of organisational vision we need in order to bring together all the dispersed energy and experience and skills of these ex-activists," Zahran claims.

But Eissa is not convinced: "To form a party before formulating the ideas of that party is ridiculous... If they believe they can be different on the basis of their mode of organisation and nothing else, then they are establishing a body which will soon fall victim to the factionalism that has always plagued the left."

Maybe so. But nostalgia is a powerful melody, once you have let it into your life. One wonders what tune Sheikh Imam would be singing if he were still alive today.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Mossad's bungling terror

Having been responsible for "the most stinging failure in the history of secret Israeli operations", an unrepentant Netanyahu appears to have survived the embarrassing fiasco, reports Graham Usher from Jerusalem

Mossad's botched attempt to assassinate Hamas leader, Khaled Misha'al, in Amman on 25 September has opened a massive rift of trust between Israel and Jordan and caused a diplomatic crisis with Canada, which has charged Mossad with providing doctored Canadian passports for the attackers. It has also strengthened Hamas in the Occupied Territories, destroying, in Misha'al's words, "the legendary image of the Mossad". One Israeli commentator has gone so far as to describe the affair as "the most stinging failure in the history of secret Israeli operations".

Reportedly conceived by Netanyahu as revenge for the recent suicide bombings in Jerusalem, the web of intrigue surrounding the attack on Misha'al took a while to unravel, but unravel it did. Once convinced that an Israeli hand was behind the assault, a furious King Hussein reportedly warned that unless an antidote for Misha'al's "illness" was provided he would break all diplomatic ties with Israel and, according to one Jordanian newspaper, "try and hang" the assailants in Jordan. He dispatched Crown Prince Hassan to convey the same message to President Clinton. On 27 September, an Israeli doctor flew to Amman with the antidote and saved Misha'al's life.

But the political price was yet to be paid. At a secret meeting in Jordan on 28 September with Israel's N... infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon and Defence Minister Yitzak Mordechai, the king said the price of the Mossad agents' extradition to Israel would be the release of Hamas's spiritual guide and founder, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. On 1 October, Yassin was airlifted to Amman while four of the six Mossad agents involved in the attack were transferred to Israel.

But there was no agreement on the fate of the two agents who were still being held by the Jordanian police. To appease his own Islamist opposition, the king reportedly demanded the release of hundreds of Hamas prisoners from Israeli jails. After further talks with Sharon on 6 October, the king agreed to hand over the two agents to Israel in exchange for Yassin's unhindered return to Gaza and the immediate release of 20 Palestinian and Jordanian political prisoners. According to Israeli press reports, Israel has also pledged the release of up to 50 more prisoners "in the coming weeks" on condition that none were either Hamas members or had "Jewish blood" on their hands.

As so often in the past, Netanyahu has so far pulled through the debacle thanks to a combination of good fortune and bravado. Because of the Jewish New Year holidays, the Israeli leader was spared much domestic media and political criticism until 5 October, four days after the story hit the world's headlines with the release of Yassin.

When he finally faced the press on 6 October, Netanyahu came out fighting. While agreeing to appoint a "clarification committee" to look into the decision-making process that had led to the operation in Jordan, Netanyahu was largely unapologetic.

"We don't believe terror should enjoy immunity," he said. "We have had many successes" in the fight against terrorism "and have made some mistakes. But we do the right thing — we are fighting a just battle". He failed to acknowledge that this latest "just battle" had involved Israel's premier overseas intelligence force violating the sovereign territory of one friendly state and forging the passports of another.

Most Israeli analysts believe Netanyahu will survive anything the clarification committee uncovers. In a typically lame performance, opposition Labour leader Ehud Barak has tried to criticise Netanyahu without criticising Mossad. The result has been a thunderous silence from the Labour opposition benches. The other main opposition party, the leftist Meretz bloc, has been less restrained, calling for a proper state enquiry into the Misha'al affair and demanding Netanyahu's resignation.

Netanyahu's main domestic problems, however, are likely to come more from Israel's military establishment and, possibly, from within his own coalition. According to Israel's *Ha'aretz* newspaper, there is currently an "internecine" struggle between Mossad and Israel's Shin Bet and military intelligence forces. Mossad has so far maintained a discreet silence over whether it approved the Misha'al operation or, as certain foreign press reports allege, had the operation forced on it by Netanyahu. Shin Bet and the military intelligence appear to have viewed the Misha'al hit as wrongheaded from the outset.



Shifting moods in the PA

Initially angered by the Israeli-Jordanian deal, which secured the release of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the Palestinian leadership is now hopeful that Yassin's return to Gaza may herald a new stage in its relations with the Islamist group. Tarek Hassan reports from Gaza

The Palestinian Authority's (PA) initial reaction to the Israeli announcement that Hamas' Sheikh Ahmed Yassin would be released and transferred to Jordan, was one of anger. Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's repeated call for the release of the aged and quadriplegic leader of the Palestinian Islamist movement, Hamas, had fallen on deaf Israeli ears, while his release was secured through secret Jordanian-Israeli negotiations, of which the PA had not an inkling.

The PA saw the deal as an attempt by both Israel and King Hussein to side-line the Palestinian leadership, and present the Jordanian monarch as the Arab leader most capable of securing concessions for Israel, even under such a hard-line government as that of Binyamin Netanyahu.

The Palestinian leadership cannot forget that Israel had at one time held to the so-called "Jordanian option", according to which a settlement of the Palestinian problem would be negotiated with the Hashemite Kingdom, and not the PLO led by Arafat, which Israel had stamped a "terrorist organisation".

Jordan's mediation also revived the old questions over the ambiguous relationship between the king and Hamas. The Islamist group, despite its strong opposition to the peace process and its suicide bombing operations, strongly denounced by both the king and Arafat, have traditionally found a safe haven in Amman. Amman maintains that the Hamas leadership in Jordan has *nothing to do with the group's military wing*.

"Palestinians are paying the price of regional alliances [in which they are not involved]. Otherwise, how can we explain Yassin's release and his handing over to Jordan. How could we also explain Washington's release of Hamas's leading member Moussa Abu Marzouk and his handing over to Jordan despite Israeli requests to try the man," said Mohamed Dahlan, head of the Palestinian Preventive Security Department, an interior intelligence body in the self-rule areas, shortly after Yassin's release.

The fact the Hamas leader was taken to Amman and not to his home in Gaza also triggered an initial outcry of anger among Palestinian students, Hamas representatives in Gaza and Yassin's family. They feared that he had been deported to Jordan and not sent there to seek medical treatment as it was first announced.

It was against this backdrop that King Hussein invited Arafat for a meeting in Amman, 24 hours after Yassin was released. Abu Marzouk also called Hamas leaders in Gaza to assure them that Yassin would return to his home in due course.

One of Sheikh Yassin's first statements after his release was that Palestinians should be on guard against Israeli attempts to provoke internal fighting within their ranks. He also reportedly reassured Arafat that he had no intention of competing with him for Palestinian leadership, once he returns to his home in Gaza.



With reassurances from both Hussein and Yassin, the PA began to change its tone, expressing Palestinian gratitude for the role played by King Hussein and appreciation for the deal he struck with Israel exchanging the two Israeli intelligence agents who were involved in the failed attempt to assassinate the head of the Hamas politburo in Amman, Khaled Misha'al, in return for the release of Yassin and a number of other Jordanian and Palestinian political prisoners held in Israeli jails.

Sheikh Yassin was given a heroes welcome in Gaza by thousands of Hamas supporters and ordinary Palestinians who view the 61-year-old Islamist leader as one of the godfathers of the Intifada. But even then, Arafat had to engage in some complicated political manoeuvres, this time not to anger Israel which has been accusing Arafat of tolerating Hamas activities. Arafat did not receive Yassin himself, sending instead his wife Soha and secretary-general of the Palestinian Presidency, Tayeb Abdel-Rehim.

Upon his arrival, Yassin told the crowds that Arafat's PA "is part of the Palestinian people. And so is Hamas. We will all work for one cause and we will remain as one people."

Such encouraging statements were interpreted by Palestinian officials as a sign that the Hamas leader was ready to tone down his group's opposition to the 1993 Oslo peace accords signed between the PLO and Israel. Yassin was quoted by news agencies as saying: "In 1987, the year the Intifada started, we started throwing stones. Then, we took parts of Hebron, Gaza and Jericho. God willing, the future will bring more good."

Abdel-Rehim said that the PA recognised that Yassin was opposed to Oslo, "but his opposition is peaceful, balanced and quiet."

Hamas leader in Gaza, Abdel-Aziz Rantisi, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he hoped Yassin's release would lead to improving ties with Arafat's PA and maintaining the unity of the Palestinian people.

Commenting on the effect of Yassin's return on relations between the PA and Hamas, Arafat's adviser, Nabil Amr, said that "the basis of this relation lies in the recognition that there is a single legitimate Palestinian leadership, which is the Palestinian Authority. Yassin's return is an opportunity to bolster Palestinian legitimacy."

But, it was not only Arafat and his PA who had to consider the future after Yassin's release. According to Hamas' Rantisi, Yassin was released to regain his post as "the leader of the Hamas group." This statement, observers noted, might be an indication that the reported split between the group's leadership in Gaza and those living in exile, especially in Jordan, is coming to an end. Ironically, it is the leadership in exile that is supposed to be more hardline, and has been accused of ordering operations against Israel without consulting with the group's leaders in the self-rule areas.

The possibility that, with Yassin's return, Hamas will have a single unified top leadership in Gaza was welcomed by Palestinian officials. PA Minister Ahmed Abdel-Rehim told the *Weekly* that Yassin's return to Gaza is likely to "restrain those of Hamas' leadership who adopt positions in favour of some regional and other non-Palestinian powers." Abdel-Rehim also hoped that Yassin's return would have "positive effects on the peace process. Sheikh Yassin is the spiritual leader of Hamas and can influence its military wing as well."

The king's gambit

King Hussein moved fast to save Jordan's relations with Israel and, in the bargain, secure the release of Hamas leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and other Jordanian and Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. Lola Keilani reports from Amman

Following the sudden release of the leader of the Palestinian Islamist militant group Hamas from an Israeli jail and his transfer to Amman aboard a helicopter sent by King Hussein, all eyes were centred on Jordan to see what it would give in return. Most observers indicate that the sheikh would be exchanged for two agents of the Israeli intelligence body, the Mossad, who have been held in Jordan after participating in a failed attempt to kill Khaled Misha'al, head of the Hamas politburo in Jordan two weeks ago.

Jordanian officials insisted at the beginning that there was no secret deal behind Yassin's release. But one week later, the sheikh was allowed to return to Gaza and the two Israeli agents were handed to Israel contrary to the wishes of Jordanian opposition parties who insisted that they should be tried. Jordanian opposition parties also insisted on the release of all other Jordanians serving prison sentences within Israeli jails.

According to political observers in Amman, the attempt on Misha'al's life resulted on the one hand, in the release of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, and on the other, the emergence of a reconciliation between Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat and the leaders of his main Palestinian opposition group, Hamas.

On Monday afternoon, while Sheikh Yassin was on a Jordanian helicopter on his way to a rapturous welcome in his home town, Gaza, nine Jordanian prisoners arrived in Jordan. Furthermore, 14 other prisoners will be arriving in the next couple of days. As such, all Jordanian prisoners held in Israeli jails will be back home. Amman also managed to secure the release of 11 Palestinians as the first group of 50 other prisoners due to be freed in the coming few weeks, which will include Hamas members.

Meanwhile, when King Hussein secured the release of the founder and spiritual leader of Hamas, he made a point to invite Arafat to Amman and to have nearly all the top Palestinian officials gather around the old man's hospital bed to exchange pledges of coordination against the new phase of Netanyahu's settlement fever.

Musa Abu Marzouk, former head of the Hamas politburo, and an influential figure in its current leadership, said that a discussion between Arafat and Yassin on the detention of Hamas members by the Palestinian Authority took place. "The president [Arafat] promised a gradual release of detained members of Hamas form PA jails," Abu Marzouk said. He added that he expected the release to coincide with the return of Yassin to Gaza.

The king had earlier succeeded in saving the life of Misha'al when he turned to US President Bill Clinton to pressure Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to provide, within a matter of hours, the antidote for the poison which the Israeli Mossad agents used in the attempt to kill Misha'al.

Several days before the two suspects were handed over to the Israeli side, the government had stressed that the two men, who held what appeared later to be forged Canadian passports, would be interrogated by the prosecutor general ahead of their trial.

Even the king said earlier this week that the proper procedures against the two suspects would be followed. But the king reiterated the government's official line when he said that "from a realistic point of view, there is no physical evidence in hand that would prove what happened to brother Misha'al. Even his companions during the attack said nobody touched him directly."

Investigators are incapable of determining the weapon or device that was used against Misha'al. According to official reports two men approached Misha'al with a mysterious device which emitted some poisonous chemical through his ear.

In an attempt to patch up relations with Jordan, it was reported that during the last 10 days, dozens of top Israeli officials have travelled secretly to Jordan. The officials included Prime Minister Netanyahu who had a long secret meeting with the king. Further officials who reportedly visited Jordan secretly also included Yitzhak Mordechai, Israeli minister of defence, Ariel Sharon, Israeli minister of infrastructure, Mossad Director Gen Dani Yatom, Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein and Cabinet Secretary Dani Naveh.

While the general public and Jordan's opposition parties were calling on the government to take serious measures against Israel, such as recalling Jordan's ambassador, the king underlined his rejection of such calls when, on Sunday, he accepted the credentials of Oded Eran as Israel's new ambassador to Jordan.

Meanwhile it is widely believed here in Jordan that the Kingdom's moderating influence had its impact on Hamas hard-liners when Sheikh Yassin said before leaving to Gaza that Hamas was ready to coexist with Israel as long as Palestinian rights are respected.

"We all call for peace.... I call on the whole world to help us regain our rights through peace. But if this path was not achieved we will not accept occupation," Sheikh Yassin said before his departure to Gaza.

Passports to state terrorism

Canadian passports, writes Joneed Khan from Montreal, have been a favourite stock-in-trade of the Israeli Mossad's covert operations — the Canadians are not appreciative

In what looks like a diplomatic equivalent of "friendly fire", three close allies in the comatose Middle East peace process find themselves bloodied after a botched operation carried out by Israeli agents using Canadian passports on Jordanian soil against the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, their alleged archenemy.

By last weekend, the incident had led to the recall of Canadian Ambassador David Berger from Israel for "consultations" — an expression of anger Canada has used in the past against Apartheid South Africa and Islamist Iran. It had also forced Israel to hand over to Jordan Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the 61-year-old ailing quadraplegic founder and spiritual leader of Hamas jailed for life in 1989 for ordering attacks against Israel.

To placate his own Zionist fundamentalists, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu got President Ezer Weizman to issue pardons and commute sentences for four Israelis jailed for killing Arabs, just before Sheikh Yassin's release was announced.

But with Israelis still celebrating the Jewish New Year, Netanyahu was coming under heavy fire from the media and the opposition, saying he had asked his intelligence chiefs from the Mossad, who are under his direct control, for a list of Hamas targets abroad after the latest suicide bombings inside Israel.

By early this week, Netanyahu was faced with the return of Sheikh Yassin to Gaza and the need to free more Palestinian detainees in order to secure the release of two Israeli agents jailed in Jordan — while Palestinian authorities were praising Canada's tough stand vis-à-vis Israel, just as Canada was seeking to bolster its credibility with its Arab partners.

What triggered the row was an attempt on the life of Hamas political chief Khaled Masha'al on 25 September by two men carrying Canadian passports identifying them as Shawn Kendall, 28, and Barry Beads, 36. A third man, listed at his hotel as Guy Ares, 30, got away without even checking out of his room.

Canada said it had offered routine consular help but, as is often the case, the two men had declined the offer. *Israel remained unusually silent.* Canada then said the passports were forgeries, and the Jordanian government-owned newspaper *Al-Ra'i* reported that the two "Canadian citizens" were indeed Mossad agents.

Thus, pressure mounted on the Canadian government to come clean about the whole affair, particularly after it was reported that the real Shawn Kendall, a Toronto native working for the United Israel Appeal, had been issued a new passport without ever reporting the loss of his previous one.

Grilled in Parliament by opposition leader Preston Manning, of the right-wing Reform Party, about Canadian passports being used "to cloak foreign operatives", Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien said this was "completely unacceptable". He asked Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy to wrap up meetings with his Arab counterparts at the UN and get back to Ottawa.

A beleaguered Axworthy conceded it was not the first time forged Canadian passports had been used as a cover for secret Israeli operations. In 1973, two Israeli agents carrying Canadian passports murdered an innocent Moroccan waiter in Lillehammer, Norway, in a failed attempt to retaliate for the massacre of 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. The last public incident involving Israeli use of Canadian passports took place in Cyprus in 1981, Axworthy said.

Kendall has been visited by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and "he's been very cooperative so far," Axworthy added.

Canada and Israel had reached an agreement of sorts after the 1981 Cyprus incident whereby Mossad agents would never again use Canadian passports in their operations abroad. In addition, the deputy head of Mossad was called to Ottawa in 1991 and told to stop using Canadian passports for operations. The Amman incident was a clear violation of this Israeli promise.

Public opinion was further roused when Victor Ostrovsky, a Canadian-born former Mossad agent, phoned Bob Mills, the Reform Party's foreign affairs spokesman, to say Canadian passports have been commonly used for more than 20 years by the Israeli secret service. The latest incident heightened the risk of retaliation against innocent Canadian nationals travelling abroad, he added.

In a bestseller he co-authored in 1990, *By Way of Deception*, Ostrovsky had described the sight of hundreds of blank Canadian passports stacked at Mossad headquarters in the 1980s. The Mossad had then gone to court, unsuccessfully, to block publication of his book.

In an interview last week, Ostrovsky explained that Israel rarely used forged US passports because discovery risked retaliation, and possible loss of access to US intelligence sharing. In the face of rising public outrage, Axworthy finally declared, on Friday, that "our own evidence suggests there was Israeli involvement in the issue," and ordered the recall of Ambassador Berger.

"We've asked a number of questions and we hope to get answers after the Israeli government goes back to business on Sunday," Berger told reporters at Ben-Gurion airport before departing for Ottawa on Saturday.

"To get the message across, I'm not sure that recalling an ambassador is enough," said the Reform's Bob Mills. But Axworthy called Berger's recall "a fairly serious step," and would not spell out what further measures might be taken. Israel expressed regret over the recall.

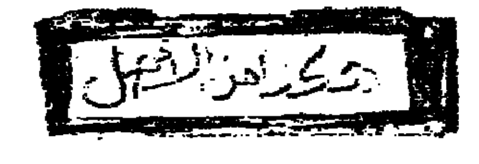
The incident is a personal setback for David Berger, the son of a prominent Jewish Canadian family, former Liberal MP and staunch friend of Israel, whose political nomination as ambassador to Tel Aviv drew fierce criticism from the Canadian Arab community — which has not forgotten his offensive remarks at a rare appearance of a Palestinian delegation led by then-Bethlehem mayor Elias Freij before a parliamentary committee in the 1980s. "Don't listen to him, he's full of shit," he is reported to have said.

While Berger complied with orders from Ottawa, his predecessor Norman Spector, named Canada's first Jewish ambassador to Israel by former Tory Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, and now publisher of *The Jerusalem Post*, was fuelling the controversy by questioning whether Israel had acted alone in Amman or whether "Canadian intelligence authorities were involved in this operation with the Israelis."

"If Mr Spector is saying that, he's wrong," shot back an angry Lloyd Axworthy.

Canada's position is particularly delicate since, as chair of the Multilateral Committee on Refugees in the framework of the Madrid Peace Process, it has often been accused by Palestinians of trying to settle the refugees in their countries of exile instead of supporting their Right of Return and their claims to adequate compensation. And PLO leader Yasser Arafat has yet to visit Canada as president of the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Axworthy expressed the hope that this incident would not hurt the peace process. Speaking in Regina on Saturday, he said he had explained Canada's position to his Arab counterparts during meetings at the UN. And he got a boost from the Palestinians when the PA declared on Sunday its appreciation for the recall of Canada's ambassador from Israel. The PA spokesman accused Israel of "violating Canada's sovereignty" by using the country's passports to perpetrate "state terrorism".



Legislators strain at PA reign

The resignation of veteran Palestinian politician Haidar Abdel-Shafi from the Legislative Council highlighted the gap between the legislative body and the Palestinian Authority led by Yasser Arafat. **Rasha Saad** reports

At a time when Palestinian officials have been pondering over the surprising release of Hamas leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and preparing for renewed peace talks with Israel under US auspices after a long stall, the resignation of the 78-year-old Haidar Abdel-Shafi from the nearly two-year-old Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) added another challenge to Arafat's Palestinian Authority (PA) on an internal level.

Since the Legislative Council was elected in internationally-monitored elections in January 1996, questions have been asked on the extent to which Arafat would tolerate the existence of another decision-making and monitoring body that might sometimes disagree with his own agenda. Such questions became more evident after a majority of the 88-Council members approved a report two months ago accusing several members of Arafat's cabinet of corruption. They asked Arafat to change his cabinet and to punish those accused of misusing their authority. So far, nothing has been done.

In a telephone interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly* from his home in Gaza, Abdel-Shafi said that his resignation came in response to the continuous attempts by the PA to sideline, obscure and generally limit the powers of the PLC. He said that the PA "tried from the very beginning to ignore the Council's resolutions in many issues especially those regarding negotiations with Israel. There was never any debate about the government's strategy or policies." He also insisted that his resignation was final.

Abdel-Shafi, who gained the highest number of votes in the legislative elections and who led the first Palestinian negotiating team after the opening of the Madrid Middle East peace conference in 1991, hoped that his resignation would send a clear message to the Palestinian electorate, to draw their attention to the fact that all is not well between the PA and their elected Legislative Council. "I believe in the collective interest. What is needed is for the people themselves to decide. I will put all my efforts into any movement for democratic change in Palestinian society. There should be popular, non-violent rallies in support of democratic change. If my resignation would lead to a better attitude from the PA, then it is worth it."

Mohamed Sobeih, secretary-general of the Palestinian National Council and Palestinian ambassador to the Cairo-based Arab League, was reluctant to comment on the resignation of Abdel-Shafi. "I do not want to comment because I do not want it to appear that we are in conflict with each other. We all have a desire for democracy." However, Sobeih explained that the PA is now facing a great challenge in its fight against the Israeli government's settlement policy. "We are threatened by a siege, and Palestinians are dying of hunger. Until we settle these crucial problems, we cannot deal with the problems of the Council."

Sobeih insisted, however, that the PLC had no mandate to interfere in the negotiations with Israel, which he belives are the preserve of the PA. "I have great respect to Abdel-Shafi, however we should not give the Council more than its authority."

Responding to a question on whether the timing of his resignation may have been ill-conceived, in view of the crisis in the peace process with Israel, Abdel-Shafi said he was not convinced that problems inside the Council had to do with the external pressures and difficulties the PNA is facing. "It has to do with the responsibilities of the Council towards the people who elected it. When people elect you, that means that they trust you and that they depend on you in defending their personal, social and political freedom."

Abdel-Shafi added that since it was elected, the Council has received many complaints regarding violations of human rights committed by the Palestinian security forces.

Abdel-Shafi added that he has been contemplating resignation for some time but he delayed his decision to see whether a collective resignation of all PLC members would take place. "In the meantime the human rights violations continued." He explained that suspects released by the Palestinian prosecutor-general were being re-arrested and administratively detained by the PA's security forces. Just last week, he added, the PA closed down a number of social institutions in Gaza simply because Israel demanded that it do so.

According to a Palestinian observer who requested anonymity, the problem between the PA and the PLC lies in the vague terms of the Oslo agreement concerning the Council and its responsibilities. "The Oslo agreement is full of contradictions and does not define adequately the relationship between the Council and the Palestinian Authority. This is one reason why there is such a misunderstanding.

The Legislative Council has faced many challenges since it was sworn-in in March 1996. Deputies have usually complained of being ignored by the PA. This kind of frustration led PLA Speaker Ahmed Qurie to threaten to resign earlier this year. Arafat talked him out of resigning, however.

One of the major disputes that is still unresolved between the Council and the PA is approving bills which are part of the new Palestinian constitution. Early this week, the Legislative Council approved bills to define the powers of each of the three branches of government: the executive, the legislative and the judiciary. The Council has been trying to pass the bills of the new constitution for the past few months. However, Arafat believes that discussing and approving the bills are not within the Council's authority and hence the bills have stayed unsigned.

Israel has also contributed to the docile nature of the Council. The Council members have often been prevented from reaching the place of their meetings on time because of the Israeli blockades at the crossing points. It has become a usual occurrence that some council members reach the place of their meetings a day or two late, having been divested of their cases and papers.

Total —unipolarity's grave digger?

Following the signing of a $2 billion gas field development deal in Tehran, the Clinton administration faces one of its toughest challenges both in the international arena and at home, writes **Safa Haeri** from Paris

The deal signed in Tehran on 28 September between an international oil and gas consortium led by the French firm Total (which also includes the Russian Gazprom and the Malaysian state oil company Petronas) and the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) brings into dispute the legitimacy of the controversial law passed two years ago by the Republican-dominated US Congress. According to the Iran-Libya Sanction Act (ILSA), commonly known as the d'Amato Law, any firm investing more than $40 million in the Iranian or Libyan oil and gas industries shall face strict sanctions from the United States, and the freezing of its national assets held in the US. This ceiling was lowered to $20 million in July this year after the Congress re-imposed the Act for another year.

The Total-NIOC contract was signed despite a formal protest which the *New York Times* says was delivered last week to the French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine by the new American ambassador Felix Robatyn. The US administration's first reaction was that the US will resort to "whatever action is appropriate under the law". Both Senator Alfonso d'Amato, the law's main initiator, and Senator Benjamin Gilman, chairman of the International Relations Committee, had urged President Clinton to punish Total by choosing "the toughest of sanctions" — including a ban on the French firm's sales in the US.

In France, the popular French Socialist prime minister, Lionel Jospin, said in a television interview: "nobody accepts the idea that the US can impose their laws on the rest of the world." Jospin further pointed out that "The famous d'Amato Law may be valid for the Americans, however, the whole of the European Union is in complete agreement with France and do not accept that the US has the right to impose its will and laws on other nations on a world-wide scale". In Russia, President Boris Yeltsin said that it was "inadmissible" for the US to impose its will on independent sovereign nation-states such as France, Russia or Iran.

"This is good news for Iran and bad news for the US," commented Mehdi Varzi, a London-based Iranian oil expert with Dresdner Kleinworth, Benson Securities. "There is no doubt about European solidarity with France. They will persist in resisting American sanctions. The Clinton administration clearly did not foresee these problems and did not calculate all the risks involved with such a law. As a result, the ball is now in the Americans' court and it looks unlikely that the Europeans will back down from their position."

Expressing its full satisfaction at both France's and the European Community's "bold and firm stance against US bullying and bluffs", Tehran claimed that the United States was isolated "having no one but the Zionists on their side". In an "authorised" commentary which reflects the official point of view, Tehran Radio said the support it received from the international community concerning the deal was a "yardstick to measure whether American statesmen have the ability to adapt to the dynamics of the international system [...] Clinton is now at a crossroads, having no other options but choosing between giving in to Zionist pressure and applying the sanctions, or adhering to international laws."

Former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said that the United States was making a fool of itself in trying to keep international oil companies from investing in Iran's energy sector. "If the United States could do something about it they would have succeeded by now," Rafsanjani said in a statement quoted by the London-based Arabic daily *Al-Quds* newspaper. "The more the Americans try, the more they make fools of themselves. Their efforts are in vain," Rafsanjani added.

The victory in the recent Iranian presidential elections by the moderate cleric, Ayatollah Mohammed Khatami, has placed President Clinton in an even more delicate position. Furthermore, the recently appointed Iranian foreign minister, Kamal Kharrazi, stated in New York recently that Tehran was ready to enter into dialogue with the US but that so far, "Iran had not received any meaningful response that would facilitate a conciliatory stance". All in all, this puts pressure on President Clinton, knowing that the opportunites may be there for working towards better relations but at the same time having to answer to a somewhat antagonistic Congress. Moreover, the extent of pressure on the US can be seen by the stance taken by its traditional allies in Europe.

As protest mounted from the international community, denouncing vehemently American extra-territorial laws and warning Washington "not to retaliate", the White House issued a statement which somewhat ducked the issue with the State Department saying that it will take "some time before it could assess if the deal has actually violated the ILSA". Faced with the prospect of an unprecedented international outcry and a major diplomatic defeat, the Clinton administration has decided to accentuate its pressure over Iran instead of a head-on collision with France, the European Community and the rest of the world, according to diplomats and analysts in Washington, Paris and London.

"Washington may have decided to save face by ignoring Total's deal, on the one hand, and focusing its attention instead on urging Europe for more concerted cooperation in the fight against the alleged Iranian support of world-wide terrorism, since on that point, there is less divergence between the Europeans and Americans", an American informed source told the *Weekly*.

"What the administration may do is to accentuate its pressures over Iran by releasing some information on its allegations concerning threats posed by Iranian nuclear and ballistic programmes as well as information on Tehran's involvement in terrorist activities, including its possible participation in the Al-Khobar bombing [of an American military compound in Saudi Arabia]," the source added.

Washington's decision to immediately dispatch the aircraft carrier Nimitz to the Persian Gulf may well fit into that plan, observers noted. The decision is said to be linked to the US warning to Iran "not to repeat" air raids in the southern Iraqi "no-fly zone" where Iranian aircraft last week bombed bases belonging to the Iraqi backed and supported Mujahedeen Khalq, situated 170 kilometers south of Baghdad.

"The irony is that though on the surface the ayatollahs have scored an important victory over the Great Satan, at the end of the day, this deal may help bring a better climate in the Tehran-Washington love-hate relationship," observed Parviz Esfahani, editor of the London-based Iranian weekly *Nimrooz*.

Domestically, the American administration faces pressure from two conflicting interest groups. The first coming from the Congress and the Jewish lobby, the latter looking for a scapegoat after Israel, Washington's only ally in this matter, had plunged the American-brokered peace process into a coma. The second coming from those who both at the Sate Department and the National Security Council defend a more open approach to Tehran. This group is strongly backed by the equally powerful oil lobby, badly affected by the d'Amato Law.

Total already has a presence in Iran through a contract to develop two of the Sirri Island oil fields, where production is due to start next year. The $600 million contract was originally awarded by the NIOC to the American firm CONOCO, but under heavy pressures from the Republicans who saw the deal as contradicting American policies, President Clinton was forced to veto it. He also banned all US oil firms from buying crude from Iran.

According to the Total-NIOC contract, the South Pars, one of the world's largest offshore gas fields, (a continuation of the North fields which belong to the neighbouring Qatar Emirate, already in production phase), would produce 57 million cubic metres of gas a day and the investing firms would recover their money over seven years after the start of production. Production of gas and condenses is scheduled to begin in the second half of 2001 and development is due to end one year later, at which time NIOC will take over as the production operator. Under the terms of a buyback contract, the partners receive a share of oil and gas output to cover the reimbursement of development costs and their compensation.

Based on the current price of oil, the payment will represent around 80,000 barrels of condenses per day for a period of seven years after the start of production. Total has a 40 per cent stake in the consortium while Russia's Gazprom and the Malaysian state oil firm Petronas each possess 30 per cent. "Once you realise that the Middle East contains two-thirds of the worlds oil reserves and one-third of gas reserves, I would say it is more important for an oil company to be there than in the States," observed Total's Chairman, Thierry Desmarest.

The treatment Total may receive from the United States will be watched eagerly by all oil and banking concerns. If Total is not sanctioned, then one has to expect a rush from other oil firms, including American giants, to sign lucrative deals with Iran, bringing billions of dollars of badly needed cash, and this is exactly what the Congress and the influential American Jewish lobby are against. If, on the other hand, Total is sanctioned, then there will be a dangerous trade and diplomatic war which will see Washington in dispute against almost every other soveriegn nation-state which, interestingly, may end Washington's role as the sole world gendarme.

One week after a cease-fire initiative announced by the military wing of the outlawed Islamic Salvation Front came into effect, Algeria's carnage has continued, offering little hope of a breakthrough, writes **Amira Howeidy**



One of the houses burned and destroyed in an attack on an Algerian village by suspected members fo the Armed Islamic Group (GIA)

Cease-fire call hangs in the balance

Instead of easing the tension in Algeria, the call for a cease-fire initiated by the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), the Islamic Salvation Front's (FIS) military wing, is triggering more violence and political conflict. The complex situation took another twist when an exiled FIS official alleged that armed gunmen tried to storm the house of the group's leader, Abassi Madani, last Thursday in an attempt to kidnap him. Neither the Algerian authorities nor Algiers-based FIS sources have confirmed the claim. Observers, however, viewed the incident as the first indication of an apparent rift over the cease-fire within FIS ranks.

"The situation is not that simple or that clear," Jaafar Hawari, FIS spokesman in Britain told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview. "We have very little evidence that the alleged kidnapping actually took place. No one confirmed it except some exiled FIS members in Europe," he added.

He also denied reports that the FIS was split over the cease-fire.

"Madani did not oppose the [ceasefire] call. He had previously expressed his support for any agreement that could stop the violence, and went as far as sending a message to the UN expressing his readiness to do anything that could stop the violence. On the other hand, the communiqué supporting the call for a cease-fire was issued by the FIS's executive committee abroad and signed by its representative Rabeh Kabir. I can go as far as assuring that it was formulated by Madani himself," Hawari said.

Asked why Madani did not sign the communiqué or issue a statement supporting it, Hawari said: "Madani is under house arrest which is equivalent to imprisonment. He is not in a position to issue political statements, sign communiqués or talk on behalf of the FIS, while this remains possible for the executive committee abroad."

The communiqué, said Hawari, was the outcome of three-month-long secret negotiations between the AIS and key officials in the army. Its details were made public two weeks ago and the AIS said that the cease-fire should go into effect on 1 October. The reported negotiations between the AIS and Algerian army generals resulted in the release of Madani half way through his 12-year jail sentence last July and the freeing of the group's third man Abdel-Qader Hashani a few days before Madani.

But last week, President Liamine Zeroual denied any dialogue with the FIS or their leaders. He insisted that the FIS was a closed file that belonged to the past, raising questions over how united the establishment was regarding its backing of the truce. The state-run media, breaking with the strictly enforced tradition of ignoring rebel statements, has given extensive coverage to the cease-fire call, suggesting that the authorities endorsed it.

"Zeroual's statements are true, the negotiations were confined to the AIS and the army. There has been no dialogue between the FIS and the government yet." Hawari said. "To put it in another way, the communiqué is the first step in the negotiations, while the second should be direct FIS-government talks," he added.

According to the AIS communiqué, signed by its top commander Madani Mezrag, the cease-fire initiative aimed at "unmasking the enemy." The statement ordered the AIS men to lay down their weapons to expose the rival militant group, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and unnamed forces "manipulating" them.

The GIA responded with a counter statement, admitting responsibility for the first time for the horriffic massacres of innocent Algerian civilians that have escalated since parliament elections were held in June. The massacres involved throat-cutting, mutilation, decapitation and the burning alive of some victims, including children and babies.

Algeria's six-year-old crisis has claimed the lives of more than 60,000 people. Violence erupted after the army intervened in early 1992 to cancel the results of the first round of parliamentary elections which the FIS had clearly won.

The failure of security forces to respond rapidly to massacres carried out near military bases has raised questions in Algeria and abroad over who was responsible for the savage killings. The FIS has charged that the Algerian army might have been involved in some killings, drawing more calls for international intervention. French President Jacques Chirac, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and former Irish President Mary Robinson, now the UN's Human Rights Commissioner, lately suggested international mediation. But all offers have been swiftly rejected by Zeroual, who said that outside help would amount to interference, preferring to leave that matter to the Algerians themselves.

"It is clear that the AIS statement is genuine," a leading member of the former ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) told the *Weekly* in a telephone interview. "It is also very obvious that the Algerian authorities, or at least some supporters of Zeroual approve of it." Whether or not it will eliminate violence, he added, "is not really the point. It is more a matter of a political arrangement, a sorting process to categorise every key player as they should be." Now the FIS and those in the government who want to stop the bloodshed, the source explained, "cannot be blamed for the carnage, especially since the FIS enjoys unannounced government backing."

But does the FIS's call mean that the outlawed party stands a chance of returning to the official political arena, albeit at a low level? Some say this is possible even under the new constitution, which bars the use of Islam as a political weapon. But for this to happen the FIS will have to be re-integrated with the political system in a way that would give new legitimacy to the regime. "This will be a victory for Zeroual and a tough defeat for the 'eradicators' who oppose any deal with the FIS," said the FLN source.

But the alleged Madani kidnapping has triggered fears that the lives, or at least the safety of FIS leaders may be at risk, following the group's initiative to cooperate in an attempt to find a way out of the crisis. "A consensus exists that the group of 'eradicators' within the regime oppose dialogue and we believe that the massacres carried out lately enjoy the support and backing of this wing. It is possible that they could do harm to our leaders to prove that they cannot control the GIA and that the FIS is powerless," said Hawari of the FIS.

So will the cease-fire bear fruit? "We hoped for a breakthrough, but Zeroual's statements fanned the flames when he implied that the Algerian regime rejects the truce... However, the FIS shall pursue the call for a cease-fire, hoping the other parties will respect it too," Hawari added.

Algeria massacres escalate

ALGERIA'S most violent Islamist militant organisation, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), warned of more bloodshed in response to the cease-fire initiative announced by the Islamic Salvation Army two weeks ago. This threat indeed became a reality this week, news agencies reported. Suspected GIA assailants killed 47 civilians, including 16 schoolchildren over the weekend in several regions of Algeria. The latest massacres added to a civilian death toll that has exceeded 140 in less than a week. On Friday, GIA suspected rebels, in a new strategy, also shelled for the first time the Algerian town of Bleida with locally-made rockets, killing 12 and wounding 85. The Algerian army, meanwhile, continued a major offensive against a GIA stronghold near the capital, Algiers.

The schoolchildren were killed on Sunday as they were heading for their classes by bus in the Bouinan area. An escort of armed volunteers, in a vehicle ahead of the schoolbus, ran over a mine and was blown up, killing all the occupants. Algerian newspapers reported that suspected GIA gunmen then opened fire with machine guns on the children and that some of them had their throats cut. The slaughter of the schoolchildren occurred as Algerian authorities celebrated International Teachers' Day. More than 700 schools have been burnt and more than 500 pupils and teachers have been killed since 1994 in attacks the authorities blame on GIA militants.

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**



Women made homeless by Saturday's cyclone that swept through Bangladesh (photo: Reuters)

A world of ethnic and religious strife yearns for peace. **Gamal Nkrumah** sees hope amid border skrimishes in Kashmir and the refugee crisis in Congo

Knocking heads together

Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral and his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif exchanged niceties on a recently activated telephone "hot line" on Friday following the flair-up last week in Kashmir where an artillery duel between the two countries across the cease-fire line dividing Kashmir, claimed 18 Indian and 20 Pakistani lives. According to Gujral, Sharif's first words were, "Your chaps have again started firing on mine."

Last week, Pakistani officials voiced their concern over India's alleged violations of Pakistani airspace by an Indian Air Force fighter jet. Protest was also voiced against the "movement" of India's short-range Prithvi missiles towards the Pakistani border, and the death of scores of Pakistani civilians and military men including a Pakistani major in Sialkot, near the border with Kashmir, in clashes with Indian troops.

New Delhi, which aserts that Kashmir is an integral part of India, insists that the dispute be resolved bilaterally. Islamabad, which India accuses of arming and training separatist Kashmiri Islamist guerrillas, seeks a United Nations-supervised referendum to determine Kashmir's future.

India and Pakistan fought three wars since they became independent from Britain in 1947 — two of these wars were fought over Kashmir. Kashmir is predominantly a Muslim province. It was, prior to 1947, a princely state of the British *raj* ruled by a Hindu *maharaja*, and was divided soon after the first war between India and Pakistan in 1947-48. India held on to the southern two-thirds of Kashmir, and Pakistan controls the northern third.

Caught in the middle and terrorised by the extreme violence which has troubled the province since 1947 are the Kashmiri people. They live continuously in fear of being driven from their homes, murdered and the periodical massacres that occur. What is even worse is that the victims of the violence, more often than not, include women and children. The current wave of separatist fighting has claimed 20,000 lives since it first erupted in 1989.

The current events within Kashmir are not a very positive message for peace. The conflict is indeed rooted in history, and runs deep into the social and ethnic fabric of sub-continental life.

The array of forces now at play in Kashmir is more complex than during the Cold War era. The United States which previously favoured Pakistan as a regional bulwark against Soviet expansionism, now follows a more even-handed policy and pushes for bilateral talks between India and Pakistan to resolve long-standing disputes such as Kashmir. Third party mediation, even if the mediator is none other than the US, is discouraged by both Washington and New Delhi.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan also applauded the efforts made by the two premiers. "On the question of Kashmir, I think what is important and what is exciting is the talks going on between India and Pakistan. There is a lot happening in that region. I was in India in March for the Non-Aligned Conference, and I spoke to both [India's and Pakistan's] foreign ministers. Now Gujral is premier and is pursuing a policy of good-neighbourliness. I think it is important that the two parties are talking, and I am very hopeful that they will make progress, improve relations and eventually resolve the issue of Kashmir. I hope [India and Pakistan] could switch resources from military to economic and social development," Annan told reporters at the 52nd UN General Assembly on 24 September.

New Delhi has to be persuaded that resolving the Kashmir question and giving the people of Kashmir the right to national self-determination are not mutually exclusive alternatives, but rather go hand-in-hand: if India rules out the second, it will not get the first. With all this convincing to do, can we be hopeful of breathing new life into the ramshackle détente between Islamabad and New Delhi?

"There are forces in Pakistan pushing for peace. The industrial and commercial lobbies are pushing for peace. But, feudal and landed gentry lobbies are against rapprochement with India. The rural landowning class feel that their interests would be threatened with increased direct trade and interchanges with India. They fear for the future of their monopolies," India's ambassador to Egypt Kanwal Sibal told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Old fears die hard and new ones are difficult to erase. "Terrorists operating in Kashmir are part of an international network of terrorist ideological leanings, funds and arms. It is dangerous to see them as 'victims' when they operate in a predominantly non-Islamic country like India and as 'terrorists' only when they operate in Islamic countries. If 62 per cent of [Kashmiris] are Muslims, 38 per cent are not. The four million Muslims in Kashmir are part of India's 150 million Muslims. Everyone is suffering in Jammu and Kashmir because of violence, not Muslims alone," Sibal said.

But there is hope. "The influential Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) recently visited Pakistan's economic and commercial powerhouse Karachi. They managed to cross the threshold, and I am sure other more positive developments will, as a result, follow. What is important is people to people contact," Sibal said. Indian and Pakistani business leaders are leading the way for the normalisation of Indo-Pakistan relations. Can they do it? "At least they mean to."

"We have in recent years progressively reduced our defence expenditure and today it stands at 2.5 per cent of our GDP and 14.7 per cent of total government expenditure. According to the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency's report on World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, in 1995, Pakistan's defence expenditure is 6 per cent of its GDP and 23 per cent of government expenditure. In per capita terms, according to the ACDA report, India's military expenditure was $9 billion in 1994 and Pakistan's $24 billion. The same report says China which is our largest neighbour, spends $52.84 billion on defence as compared to India's $8.23 billion. This highlights the modesty of our defence outlay," Sibal said.

"By definition, any military expenditure in any part of the world reduces the resources available for development purposes. It is indisputable that a peace dividend — that is, savings on military expenditure — would help in enhancing investments in development," PA Sangma, the speaker of the Indian Parliament told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Sangma's Pakistani counterpart, Illahi Bukhsh Soomro, speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly agreed. "We need to devote more resources to development and away from arms. But, Pakistan cannot afford to let India set the rules of negotiation. There is a limit to how much bullying and blackmail Pakistan can put up with," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Still, India and Pakistan have sanctioned top-ranking military contacts to defuse tensions in Kashmir. At a breakfast meeting at the UN in New York last month, Gujral and Sharif pledged to strengthen communications between both countries' front-line commanders. However the skirmishes and the killing will go on as the talking does. Following the escalation of cross-border shelling and artillery exchanges, the emphasis of the talks between top-ranking Indian and Pakistani civilian and military officials has to be squarely on resolving the Kashmiri quagmire. Talking may not open the way to a lasting peace but refusing to talk certainly cannot. Not to risk failure is to ensure it.

But let us not look for miracles. Let us get one thing straight: the heart of the matter is the suffering of the Kashmiri people. They must not be used as pawns in the struggle for dominance in the subcontinent. Distrust between Islamabad and New Delhi is not so explosive that border skirmishes must immediately stop if catastrophe is to be averted. But, the simmering tensions in Kashmir must come to an end so that the people of that war-torn land might find peace. Yes, there is a certain urgency in the efforts to avoid another full-scale war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, but there are no short cuts in the road to lasting peace in Kashmir. Both Indian and Pakistani leaders are brave to take to the path of peace.

Homo homini lupus

The Latin maxim, *Homo homini lupus*, men are like wolves to each other, is an apt description of the political infighting currently taking place in Central Africa and the Great Lakes region of the continent. For no one is this description more appropriate than the Rwandan Hutu refugees as they are jostled to-and-fro between several neighbouring countries. As a number of countries have thrown out or threatened to throw out the refugees, the international community has sounded the alarm bells.

Last Thursday, President Laurent Desire Kabila of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) repatriated 800,000 Rwandan refugees — a move seen in the West as a "blatant violation of international law." Two days later, Kabila confirmed in writing that a United Nations team investigating human rights violations in ex-Zaire could start travelling to alleged Rwandan ethnic Hutu massacre sites. The Congolese authorities delayed. The stage was set for a confrontation between Kabila and other African leaders on one hand and the West and the UN on the other.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has long spearheaded the fight to guarantee refugees their rights in their chosen countries of asylum but has run into problems with some African governments. However, the UN and its affiliate organisations, including the UNHCR, have America's full backing in protecting the refugees despite the fact that some are criminals who participated in the massacre of their Tutsi compatriots. The UN has come under fire from several African states because of its perceived attempts to protect the refugees whom the host African countries view as a threat to their internal security.

Last Friday, the UNHCR announced that the Interior Ministry of the Democratic Republic of Congo ordered humanitarian agencies dealing with Rwandan refugees to vacate the North Kivu region bordering Rwanda. The UNHCR ordered all non-essential staff out of the region and warned of an impending catastrophe.

Last Friday, Bill Richardson, the United States Permanent Representative to the UN expresed full support for the UNHCR and warned that the UN Security Council is running out of patience with Kabila for failing to respond to the human right's mission dispatched by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the Congo to investigate reports of the massacre of ethnic Hutu refugees in the former Zaire. Richardson, the current president of the Security Council, is viewed with suspicion in many African states because of his previous involvement in crisis management in African civil wars such as in Sudan and his bias against government forces.

The UN and the West say they are concerned about Kabila's repeated orders to cancel UN plans to investigate reports of the massacre of Hutu refugees and search for mass graves in Congo. Kabila retorted by questioning the sudden interest in Congo's domestic affairs. "How come," Kabila asked, "the West and the UN remained silent through the 32 years when former Zairian President Mobutu Sese Seku was in power and gross human rights violations and massacres were committed by Mobutu's henchmen on innocent Zairean civilians? Why the Western obsession with the fate of Hutu refugees who fled to Zaire after massacring their ethnic Tutsi compatriots?"

The UN and the Congolese authorities are at loggerheads. Last week, High Commissioner Sadako Ogata expressed "deep concern, sorrow and anger" about the steady erosion of the basic asylum principles on the continent. She said urgent steps are necessary to address what she described as "a crisis of protection" in Africa. Citing the recent expulsion by Gabon of eight UNHCR-recognised refugees, Ogata said such moves against people with a legitimate claim to refugee status, if not prevented, could sound the death knell of the asylum regime in Africa.

"UNHCR field officers are under pressure to close down transit centres and local authorities are threatening to carry out their own 'humanitarian' repatriation," Fernando Del Mundo, UNHCR spokesman, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Only a handful of refugees are emerging from hiding in ex-Zaire. An increasing number of those coming out of the Congo forests and those reaching other asylum countries after travelling for months from the camps near the Rwandan border refuse to return back to Rwanda," Del Mundo pointed out.

The question is why do the refugees fear returning to Rwanda if they are innocent of taking part in the massacre of their Tutsi compatriots? UNHCR has mobilised a large number of protection officers to talk to the refugees and find out who among them deserve continued international protection, said Del Mundo. "UNHCR is concerned that legitimate refugees, following individual status determination proceedings, may not receive asylum and be sent back to Rwanda," Del Mundo said.

Proposals for negotiations on the refugee issue have come to naught because "Rwanda has always felt that there is no need to hold a meeting. I suspect that some other countries in the region also feel the same," Del Mundo explained. He went on "We want to get to the root causes of the ethnic conflicts and other problems of the region. But Rwanda feels that any discussions on the root problem is synonymous with interference in its internal affairs. The same goes for the Democratic Republic of Congo," Del Mundo added. Only Tanzania and Kenya have responded positively to the proposal.

Del Mundo said that efforts are under way to resolve the refugee crisis. "A meeting [between UNHCR and the concerned nations] is planned for September, but no firm date has been set," Del Mundo told the *Weekly*. Del Mundo conceded that there have been some brushes with the authorities in some of the countries of the region, including Rwanda, but "generally speaking, our relations with the governments of the region have been smooth," Del Mundo said. Augustine Mahiga, a Tanzanian national, is at present holding consultations with the Organisation of African Unity Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim on behalf of the UNHCR.

The problem is that many of Rwanda's neighbours fear the heavily armed paramilitary groups hiding among the refugees and, therefore, have closed off certain areas where the refugees are concentrated to Western aid workers. Aid workers have made allegations that the refugees are being harassed and sometimes killed by the authorities in these countries. "From January to mid-August this year, more than 200,000 Rwandan refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaire, were repatriated to Rwanda. Some 135,000 of them received UNHCR aid in returning, including more than 65,000 who joined airlift flights that began in late April. Of those airlifted about 42,000 came from Kisangani and 11,000 from Mbandaka, both in former Zaire. The others were flown from 10 other places in ex-Zaire, Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville," Del Mundo revealed.

The refugees have been stigmatised by their association with the instigators of the 1994 massacres. The clearest sign yet that the international community is determined to see justice done was the setting up of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) based in the Tanzanian town of Arusha.

The Rwandan government welcomed the 18 July 1997 arrest and indictment of Rwandan genocide criminals in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital. "In this regard, the government of Rwanda would like to express its appreciation to the ICTR and the UN," Colonel Frank Mugambaga, the Director of Cabinet at the Rwandan Presidential Office stated. Mugambaga also thanked Kenya's President Daniel Arap Moi and Kenya's government for facilitating the apprehension of the criminals "in observation of Security Council Resolution 995".

"The arrest of seven of the top Rwandan suspects is a possible signal that the court in Arusha is finally heading in the right direction," Mugambaga added. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, former Rwandan minister of the family and women's affairs, appeared before the ICTR and was charged with participating in the organisation of the massacre of defenseless ethnic Tutsis in 1994. Former Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, who died in a plane crash in 1994, Nyiramasuhuko and her son Arsene Shalom Ntahobali, allegedly masterminded death squads in the southern Rwandan university town of Butare. Both mother and son pleaded not guilty.

The deliberate mystification of the ethnic Hutu refugee problem in the Great Lakes region is two-fold. On the one hand, it is tantamount to an international campaign to protect war criminals who are no different from the Nazis, responsible for the deaths of millions of Jews during the Second World War. On the other, it casts a long shadow of doubt on independent African countries' judicial systems. The impression given by the international media is that Africans are incapable of running their own affairs.

The Rwandan government has repeatedly warned that the refugee camps in neighbouring countries were being turned into armed garrisons for people who had participated in the genocide in 1994 and who did not hide their agenda of wishing to continue their campaign of terror against ethnic Tutsis in Rwanda, Burundi and elsewhere in the Great Lakes region.

The Rwandan authorities recently protested the manner in which the country's image was tarnished because of the Western media's coverage of the refugee problem. The Rwandan government says that the words of Rwanda's Vice-President and Minister of Defence Major-General Paul Kagame were twisted in an interview he gave to the *Washington Post* (9 July, 1997). In the interview, Kagame conceded that his troops helped Kabila's troops and were critical to his quick success. The implication is that Kagame's troops went after the Hutus who had taken refuge in Congo. Democratic Congo's President Kabila likewise recently protested at the international media's coverage of his government's stance on the Rwandan Hutu refugees issue. He also criticised humanitarian aid workers.

"When the wounds are still fresh in people's minds it is impossible to discuss causes. People want retribution and the punishment of the criminals who butchered 500,000 people," an African diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity told the *Weekly*.

Germany faces the test of time

The seventh anniversary of German reunification is as good a time as any to reflect on the accomplishments and shortcomings of Europe's major economic powerhouse. But what about German aid to the Third World, asks **Mohamed Issa El-Sharkawi** from Frankfurt

Germany celebrated the seventh anniversary of its reunification on 3 October with much aplomb. German Chancellor Helmut Kohl delivered a splendid address in the sumptuous surroundings of Stuttgart's Opera House to mark the occasion. Kohl urged Germans to be optimistic and to be proud of what their great nation has achieved seven years after reunification. He pointed to the success of integrating the former German Democratic Republic or East Germany, and he pledged to bring down unemployment. Kohl did however concede that there is a long way to go before East Germany is fully reconstructed.

Kohl talked at length about the greatest challenge that faces Germany today — unemployment. The German unemployment rate is higher now than it has ever been since 1933. It now stands at a staggering 11.6 per cent and is still rising.

There is no doubt that Germany's economic problems have reflected badly on its record in contributing aid to the world's poorest countries. Indeed the amount of German aid to the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America has dropped significantly in the last few years. Dieter Brauer, the editor of the specialised German publication *Development and Cooperation*, warned in its September/October 1997 issue that, "German development aid to poor countries stood at 0.42 of Germany's Gross National Product in 1990 and has been slashed to 0.28 in 1997." *Development and Cooperation*, published by the prestigeous German Institute for International Development, predicted that German aid to poor countries will fall further next year and in years to come.

Today, Germany's Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development has a budget of 7,636 billion marks. The launch of the single European currency, to which Kohl and his political opponents are committted, is the overriding concern of Germany's political establishment. Germany's public finances have been under unprecedented strain because of the exorbitant costs of reunification. That has been compounded by soaring unemployment, especially in east Germany, which puts a huge additional burden on the exchequer. Social welfare has experienced major cutbacks also.

"People in Germany today are more concerned about the country's immediate problems. By and large, they are no longer interested in the problems of the developing countries. Today, there are, after all, an unprecedented 4.5 million unemployed Germans," Brauer said.





British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Russian President Boris Yeltsin smile to the cameramen in the Kremlin. Blair is on a state visit to Russia and is accompanied by a large delegation of British business leaders. British companies are expected to sign lucrative contracts with Russian firms (photo:Reuters)

This green and modern land

What is New Britain? Not an island off the coast of Papua New Guinea, as you may have been taught at school, but a vision close to the heart of the leader of the British Labour Party. Peter Snowdon casts a sceptical eye over the behaviour of its inhabitants

The British people, with their peculiar gift for irony, chose 1 May — known to oppressed masses elsewhere in the world as Labour Day — to consign socialism to the dustbin, or at least the recycling centre, of history.

A tidal wave of revulsion at the corruption, complacency and — worst of all — incompetence of John Major's Tory rump government swept "New Labour" to power in a victory of historic proportions. The nation clasped them to its bosom, not because they were demonstrably better than the last shower, but because it was unimaginable that anyone could be any worse.

At the time many pundits predicted a swift demise for New Labour — or at least, a rapid reversion to "bad" Old Labour ways. Taxes would be raised, the unions would re-emerge from the closet to rule the roost, business confidence, and the economy with it, would collapse within weeks, if not days. But none of that has happened. Instead, we have an independent central bank, rigorous public spending limits, chairmen of oil companies promoted to ministerial positions, tuition fees for university students and promises to privatise parts of the state the previous government never dared dream of. The demons of socialism have been well and truly exorcised.

The last five months in power must rate as the most extended honeymoon period enjoyed by a government in the history of British parliamentary democracy. This week's party conference in Brighton was notable, not for any ground-breaking policy statements, but chiefly for more of the same.

A Labour-commissioned poll, announced in advance of the opening, claimed that 93 per cent of the British people were "satisfied" with Tony Blair as prime minister. As Bill Clinton's chief pollster commented: "Not even Saddam gets that sort of approval rating."

The conference itself was staged as a week-long demonstration of unanimity and the means of unanimity. Even the defeat of Peter Mandelson, Machiavelli to Tony Blair's Prince, in his attempt to win a seat on the National Executive Committee was rapidly reinterpreted as good news — a necessary humiliation from which the favourite would finally emerge freed of the shackles of other people's envy. The Conference gaily passed the "Partnership for Power" proposals, thus effectively reducing itself to a rubber stamp. Policy decisions will henceforth be taken by a Joint Policy Committee and a National Policy Forum, both of which will meet in closed session. Democracy (of a sort) has been superceded by the will to consensus.

The leader's own speech — addressed more to the nation than to his party — confirmed this impression. Blair is an apostle of unity who makes "One Nation" Toryism look deliberately divisive, and doubtless in private considers the Holy Trinity to be a needlessly complicated arrangement. He speaks, not for himself, nor for his party, but for the People, whose spirit has been reborn, free of class struggle and exploitation, not through any concrete improvement in their standard of living or in the economic and social systems, but through their mystic marriage with New Labour. When he describes the men and women he saw on his journey to Buckingham Palace on the morning after his election victory, he is not describing politics as we know it — ideology, power — but the Kingdom of God on earth. It is a very British vision:

"They were liberated. Theirs were the smiles of tolerant, broad-minded, outward-looking, compassionate people and suddenly they learned that they were in the majority after all. As one woman put it to me, 'We've got our government back'. And with them I could sense confidence returning to the British people, compassion to the British soul, unity to the British nation, and that all three would give us new found strength. The people were yearning for change in their country, at a time when they could see we had had the guts to modernise our party. The two came together. The result is a quiet revolution now taking place. Led by the real modernisers — the British people."

If the genius of New Labour has been to present itself as an efficient, sincere, and "compassionate" version of the Tory party, then its greatest single achievement to date has been to take John Major's patchy and undernourrished vision of a "classless society" and turn it into a rhetorical reality.

Socialism, for all its Manichean virtues, had the fault of suggesting that where there were problems, there might also be guilty parties — "the rich", as they were rather quaintly known — who could usefully be called to account. Now "modernity" has replaced socialism. It is an ideal to which we can all aspire, rich and poor alike.

Yet in many ways, it is quite an old-fashioned sort of modernity we are being offered. It emphasises responsibilities, not rights. It calls for stronger families, not fairer terms of employment. It sees no contradiction between capitalist accumulation and the eradication of poverty: and why should it? If all the British people were indeed as tolerant, broad-minded and compassionate as Tony Blair assures us we are, then perhaps we could be confident that those who have nothing need only ask for less, and they will receive more.

It is this confusion that allows New Labour to present itself as a radical reforming government — one committed to the creation of full employment and the elimination of age-old hatreds — and yet at the same time as a friend to business, intent on helping the enterprising reap the benefits of globalisation. It may have jettisoned progressive taxation in favour of making the middle classes pay for public services as a way of redistributing wealth, but it remains wedded to the productivist illusions that are intrinsic to the Western economic consensus. The only way to make sure there is enough to go round is by first making sure there is more.

It is also a government of great ambition — one that sees New Britain as the leading nation in a New Europe, a "modern" Europe reshaped in New Labour's image. That is what Blair means when he says he wants Britain to be a "model 21st-century nation", a "beacon to the world". And he may be proved right — New Labour is nothing if not a party that knows a power vaccuum when it sees one.

Yet that "beacon" looks increasingly like a feat of technocratic engineering, to be switched on and off from the Party Communications Centre at Millbank Tower, rather than the spontaneous flame of popular democratic feeling. The real test of this government will not be the rigour of its macro-economic policy, nor even its ability to preserve the National Health Service, "the people's heritage". The real test is whether it will have the guts to deliver on its (vaguely-worded) promises to return power to "the people", rather than simply talking about them, and for them.

In this context, devolution for Scotland, Wales and (eventually) Northern Ireland is merely the tip of the iceberg. Britain is still living in, and off, the history of its empire — an urban empire that destroyed the rural economy of pre-industrial England as surely as it annexed the lands of others. As a result there is today not one Britain, but countless different, divergent, discordant Britains, all crammed together onto one tiny overcrowded island, 75 per cent of whose surface area is owned by 1 per cent of the people.

Blair's project may sound noble on the conference platform, in the ears of the angels of May. But out in the many Britains where angels are in short supply, people have already taken politics back into their own hands. In the tree houses and the tunnels of the road protesters, in the credit unions and the local trading schemes, people are rediscovering that there are other ways of doing things — as many different ways as there are people. From there, the call to unity can be heard for what it is — at best irrelevant, at worst another threat to already limited freedoms.



Watershed in Irish peace process

The two major parties in Northern Ireland sat together for the first time since Stormont was dissolved in 1972. Mansoor Mirza explores some of the problems of the current talks and their chances of success

For so long the Northern Ireland peace process was plagued with difficulties which seemed insurmountable. However, after more than two decades of some of the worst terrorist violence, the peace process in Ireland has been given a real chance of working and the prospects of a sustainable and lasting peace coming into fruition look possible. There is, however, still much work to be done and only the first tentative steps have been taken towards the realisation of peace in the troubled province.

It is widely believed that peace in Northern Ireland cannot be achieved without the participation of all of the groups in the province. This has continued to be a major obstacle as Sinn Fein were excluded from the recent all-party talks at Stormont. Finally however, we have a situation where the two major political communities are present even though the presence of the Unionists was in serious doubt even after the first momentous occasion of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), and Sinn Fein coming together. At the meeting in mid-September, the UUP proceeded to read out a statement to Sinn Fein and others that were present, which called for the expulsion of Sinn Fein from the talks as the Unionists still believed that Sinn Fein have not given up violent means of achieving a settlement. This demand was shrugged away by Senator Mitchell, chairman of the plenary session of the talks who was appointed by US President Bill Clinton and the British and Irish governments. Before giving a chance to Sinn Fein to respond to their unrealistic demands, David Trimble, the leader of the UUP, and the other UUP representatives walked out.

One of the obstacles however that still remains from the Unionist side is the Reverend Ian Paisley and his Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). At a rally held in Belfast last week by the DUP, it was evident that they still hold substantial support in parts of Belfast and indeed are an integral part of any future settlement. At the same time, although a majority of Unionists approve of participation in the talks and the 'confidence building measures', a minority are still deeply opposed to such negotiations.

In any peace process, the desire for peace is paramount. Furthermore, this should be followed by 'peaceful discourse'. It was painstakingly clear at the DUP rally that neither was evident. On the contrary, personal abuse was being thrown by Reverend Ian Paisley at all those involved in the talks. How far the DUP are capable of de-railing the talks very much depends on David Trimble's UUP and its handling of the current goings on within the Unionist tradition.

The UUP on the other hand recognise the advantages and need for peace. Now that the IRA's second cease-fire which has been in force since mid July has been seen to hold, it has become increasingly difficult for David Trimble and the UUP to stay out of the talks.

In an article in the London *Daily Telegraph*, William Ross, a UUP member of parliament commented that "we will not go along with the talks just for the sake of keeping the show on the road". This may be a wise position.

The purpose of the talks, however, is not simply to 'keep the show on the road'. The current confidence building measures have been designed to do exactly that — build confidence between the different communities. Concessions have been made by both sides — the Catholics and the Unionists and face-to-face meetings are an acknowledgment of the concessions and a symbolic gesture that shows that the desire for peace exists. Symbolic gestures of accommodation and respect are crucial elements in any peace process. The talks are a chance for both sides to air their concerns but at the same time to show that a discourse for peace can and does exist.

Sinn Fein, after the breakdown of the first cease-fire, have secured a second cease-fire from the IRA, which was announced and came into effect in July 1997. The British government decided to wait six weeks after the cease-fire came into effect before allowing Sinn Fein to take their seats at the negotiating table. Having done this, Sinn Fein, led by their leader Gerry Adams, put their signature to the six so-called 'Mitchell principles' that were developed by the former Senator that helped establish the framework for negotiations now entering a crucial stage.

The task for Gerry Adams is to persuade the Provisional IRA to give democratic principles a chance at working out a peace. So far, he has been able to do so. However, the Unionists' fears and suspicions are given credence by the breakdown of the last cease-fire in July 1995 with the detonation of the London Docklands bomb.

One can understand the claims by Unionists that Sinn Fein and the IRA are merely 'two sides of the same coin'. However, this is untrue in a number of respects. First, after the July 1995 breakdown of the cease-fire, it became apparent that Gerry Adams and Sinn Fein had no idea of the bomb. This was shown by the attempts Gerry Adams made to reinstate the broken cease-fire. Secondly, the Unionists were partly to blame for the breakdown of the cease-fire because of the unrealistic concessions they persuaded the then British government to demand of the IRA via Sinn Fein.

It is in this area, where Tony Blair's Labour government seems much more equipped than its Tory predecessors to keep the peace process moving forward. The previous Tory government was too often held to ransom by the demands of the Unionists, dependent as it was on their support the House of Commons. The present Labour government, with a substantial parliamentary majority, is not laden with such a burden.

The real difference in the current peace process is that it is being played out on a level surface. The Unionists are no longer able to demand anything from the government in London in return for their parliamentary support. Sinn Fein, for its part, has agreed to support "total disarmament" of all paramilitary organisations and to abide by the terms of any agreement reached through the negotiations, or failing that, to work for change only through democratic means. This seems to indicate that Sinn Fein has brought the Provisional IRA under its control.

It remains to be seen, however, whether the Unionists will be able to do the same with regards to the Protestant paramilitary groups.

A nation again?

A new autonomy dawns for the Scottish people — but is that independence they can see glimmering on the horizon? Gavin Bowd reports from St Andrews on the mood in the former English colony

On 11 September 1997, seven centuries after William Wallace (of *Braveheart* fame) defeated the English at the Battle of Stirling Bridge, the Scottish people chose to restore the Parliament that they lost in the Act of the Union of 1707.

Years of Thatcherite 'occupation', the sweeping labour victory in May of this year, and unprecedented unity of the anti-conservative parties, including the Nationalists, built up an unstoppable momentum in favour of devolution. On a higher than expected turnout, clear majorities were obtained for a Scottish parliament with the power to vary income tax by 3 per cent. Only two peripheral regions, the Orkney Islands in the far north and Dumfries and Galloway in the far South, voted against tax-varying powers.

In keeping with the inscrutable nature of its electorate, the scenes in Scotland on election night were hardly euphoric: instead, the nation had given a quiet but firm 'yes' to devolution.

Scottish politics is now entering a new phase. Instead of the Labour/Tory split that dominates Westminster politics, four political parties were be vying for power in the new parliament in Edinburgh. The introduction of a dose of proportional representation will probably mean that no party can alone hold a clear majority. Labour has never had to deal with Nationalist opposition and the Nationalists have never had to conduct themselves as a potential party of government. In the run-up to the first Scottish parliament elections in May 1999, new coalitions will have to be formed, with all the compromises and soul-searching that this entails.

The key question for Scottish politics is the future of nationalism. To what extent does the result of 11 September mean that Scotland is, as the headline of the daily newspaper *The Scotsman* declared, "a nation again"? Does devolution strengthen the United Kingdom or, does it, as Nationalists and Conservatives both claim, herald its break-up? Is the cause of independence now redundant, or is it the logical conclusion of the process of devolution?

The question has dominated the proceedings of the annual conference of the Scottish National Party (SNP), meeting in Rothesay on 25-28 September. The Nationalist strategy appears to be to work in the new Parliament, but in order to exploit differences between Edinburgh and Westiminster. By demonstrating how limits on the Scottish parliament's legislative powers harm the nation's interests, the SNP hope to persuade the people of the case for outright independence.

Some future scenarios can be imagined, particularly on the issue of defence, which remains a reserved domain of Westminister. The SNP could build a parliamentary majority in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament. Another grievance could be that cuts in defence spending are not benefiting Scotland, which contributes disproportionately to the British Army's role as a world peacekeeping force.

A Scottish parliament may touch on another reserved domain, that of negotiating European treaties, by opposing policies that penalise Scottish fishing. In such scenarios, Edinburg would find itself challenging the power of Westminster. If the parliament cannot make a unilateral declaration of independence from the United Kingdom, it could call a referendum that would express forcefully the separatist aspirations of the Scottish people.

There are, however, several factors which make independence unlikely. The Nationalists will be arguing for complete independence at a time when, with European integration, its trappings — separate army, diplomatic service and currency — are appearing increasingly obsolescent. There is no evidence of a groundswell of popular support for independence: indeed, it was from 'Nationalist' strongholds that there came some of the smallest majorities in favour of even devolution.

Through a sense of patriotic duty, the SNP, by making the new parliament work as well as possible, may merely confirm the Scottish people in their moderate choice.

Another problem for the Nationalists is that they are isolated at a time when alliances will be essential for wielding influence. If, before the referendum, the SNP was one of the three anti-Conservative parties, it is now confronted by three Unionist parties (Labour, Liberal Democrats, Conservatives). Any alliance with the SNP is bound to anger both anti-Nationalists and Nationalist purists.

Ironically, the new Parliament may make possible a comeback by devolution's most ardent opponents, the Conservatives, who lost all their Westminster seats in Scotland on 1 May. The Scottish Conservative Party could find a role as party of resistance to any increases in taxes and public spending by the new parliament. They will argue that the Scottish people will have to decide to pay the price of devolution: if Scotland really wants to be a nation again, it should not expect handouts from its partners in the United Kingdom, especially England.

In may in fact be *English* nationalism that makes separation possible. The new parliament will have to address the question of why Scottish politicians should still be able to sit in Westminster and make decisions that concern only the English, when their English counterparts cannot, after 11 September, make decisions concerning the Scots. There is also the question of the out-of-date funding formula which means that Scotland receives a disproportionate amount of money from the British Treasury. If Edinburgh does not address these anomalies, it will not be long before English politicians, resentful of the "free-loading" Scots, will do so.

Privatisation's next target — public banks

Public sector banks must be privatised to improve efficiency, but not everyone has the same vision of just how they should be sold. **Niveen Wahish** reports

With the privatisation programme now under full swing, officials are setting their sights on some of the country's strategic enterprises — state-owned banks.

Currently, four public sector banks — Banque Misr, the National Bank of Egypt, Bank of Alexandria, and Banque Du Caire — have been listed by the government as privatisation possibilities.

But while privatisation officials debate which one be the first on the bloc, another debate is raging between bankers and economists as to whether they should be privatised at all.

Opponents to the bank privatisation argue that many of these institutions have sizable investments in the Egyptian economy which are not necessarily profitable, but are necessary, such as infrastructural projects. Should they be sold to investors, the new owners may not be as interested in making such investments.

But Mohamed Ozlap, general manager of the Misr International Bank (MIBank), one of Egypt's largest joint-venture banks, says that privatising the "big four" banks is necessary and inevitable. Reforms in the banking sector, he said, have produced tremendous results not seen in other sectors. But so long as the public-sector banks stay in state hands, they will not be privy to such gains.

For these banks to be profitably sold off, said Ozlap, they must be properly evaluated and restructured — and therefore must be more transparent.

Further, the banks should be sold to strategic or anchor investors, he said.

"I don't think that selling 10 or 15 per cent of the shares is privatisation," said Ozlap. "It could be a step towards privatisation, but unless there is a majority ownership by the private sector, then it is not real privatisation."

While many of these public sector banks have earned the confidence of millions of Egyptians, they have a massive debt problem which, says Alaa Amer, executive director of Al-Ahly Development and Investments, the government must work on.

"Before the shares of such banks are placed on the stock market, we must make sure that they are no less profitable than any other bank on the market," he said.

The government, said Amer, is likely to follow the same formula used so far in selling the shares of joint venture banks. With joint-venture banks, the government has sold a portion of the shares to the public, but reserved larger chunks for private investors, including companies and institutions.

In the case of state-run banks, however, it would be better to target an international anchor investor who can use their experience in finance to build a stronger base for the banks.

"Whenever there is input from an efficient international partner, they tend to re-organise the institutions they buy into," said Amer.

Another advantage to targeting anchor investors is that the government would not only be able to negotiate the sale price of the bank, but would also be able to review the potential buyer's investment plan.

"We must look at the investor's experience and this prospective strategy in developing the company, because what is important in the end is the macro-effect (of the sale) on the economy," he said.

But the key to a successful privatisation of public sector banks, whether they are sold to local or international investors, is to overhaul the management structure which, Amer said, cannot be done through the sale of 10 or 15 per cent stakes.

Given the shoddy management, overwhelming debts and poor performance of these banks now, only an anchor investor will be willing to buy, stated Amer.

"He will pay a price to take it as is, and then restructure it and then take the risk that the bank's position can be turned around in three or four years," he said.

Ibrahim Hegazi, assistant professor of marketing and international business at the American University in Cairo, said that the weak position of the banks will not attract many investors and shareholders, but these are not the groups who should be allowed to buy the banks, anyway.

"For strategic reasons pertaining to the future of this country, these banks should never be sold to a private an anchor investor," said Hegazi.

Instead, the shares should be sold off gradually in blocks.

The banks, however, must be sold so that their performance can be upgraded.

"The way Egyptian banks are run is not up to international standards," he said. They must be re-staffed, and their managers retrained to be able to compete on the same level as their international counterparts.

USAID doles out more money

THE MINISTRY of International Cooperation signed eight grant agreements with the United States Agency for International Development last week. The agreements are valued at $266 million.

The USAID grants will be used in supporting private sector enterprises, agricultural policy reform and water and waste water projects.

One of the agreements is a $50 million grant for the support of private sector enterprises through the Private Sector Commodity Import Program. The CIP provides financing for Egyptian businesses to import equipment and materials from the United States.

Another agreement provides $44 million to assist the Egyptian Electricity Authority in improving services to all residents and commercial enterprises. The third grant, valued at $10 million, aims at increasing the participation of young women in basic education.

Water and waste water infrastructure investments in the communities of Mansoura, Aswan and Luxor have received a grant of $70 million.

The fifth agreement grants the Ministry of Agriculture $69 million to encourage the removal of policy barriers to private enterprises in the sector. This agreement seeks to create a liberal, competitive marketing system and stimulate sustainable agricultural growth.

The final grant gives the Ministry of Health $15 million to improve the quality of its services and to make health care readily accessible in all governorates.

Another 11 grant agreements, totaling $124 million, were signed between the two countries one week ago.

Poor, but not marginal

THE EGYPTIAN informal sector has grown in proportions that make it a potentially powerful force in the national economy, a new study concluded last week.

It was conducted by the Peruvian Institute for Liberty and Democracy, the Egyptian Centre for Economic Studies and the Cabinet's Information and Decision Support Centre.

The study estimated that the value of the informal real estate owned by the poor in Egypt is roughly $240 billion, representing 92 per cent of the urban sector and 87 per cent of the rural sector.

The study was released during a visit to Cairo by the ILD's president, Hernando de Soto, last week. In a conference held to explain the findings of the report, de Soto said that this property is considered to be "dead capital".

"Assets of the poor cannot be used in efficient and legally secured market transactions because ownership cannot be readily traced and validated, and exchanges cannot be governed by a legally recognised set of rules," he said.

"It is useless as collateral; it can neither secure a bank loan or guarantee the payment of water,, electricity or other infrastructure services."

The study found that the value of "dead" real estate holdings in Egypt is 30 times greater than the market value of companies registered on the Cairo stock market, 55 times greater than the value of foreign direct investments in Egypt until 1996 and 116 times greater than the value of public enterprises privatised between 1992 and 1996.

A major requirement of reforming the economy is the property of the poor by titling, registration, surveying and mapping, said de Soto.

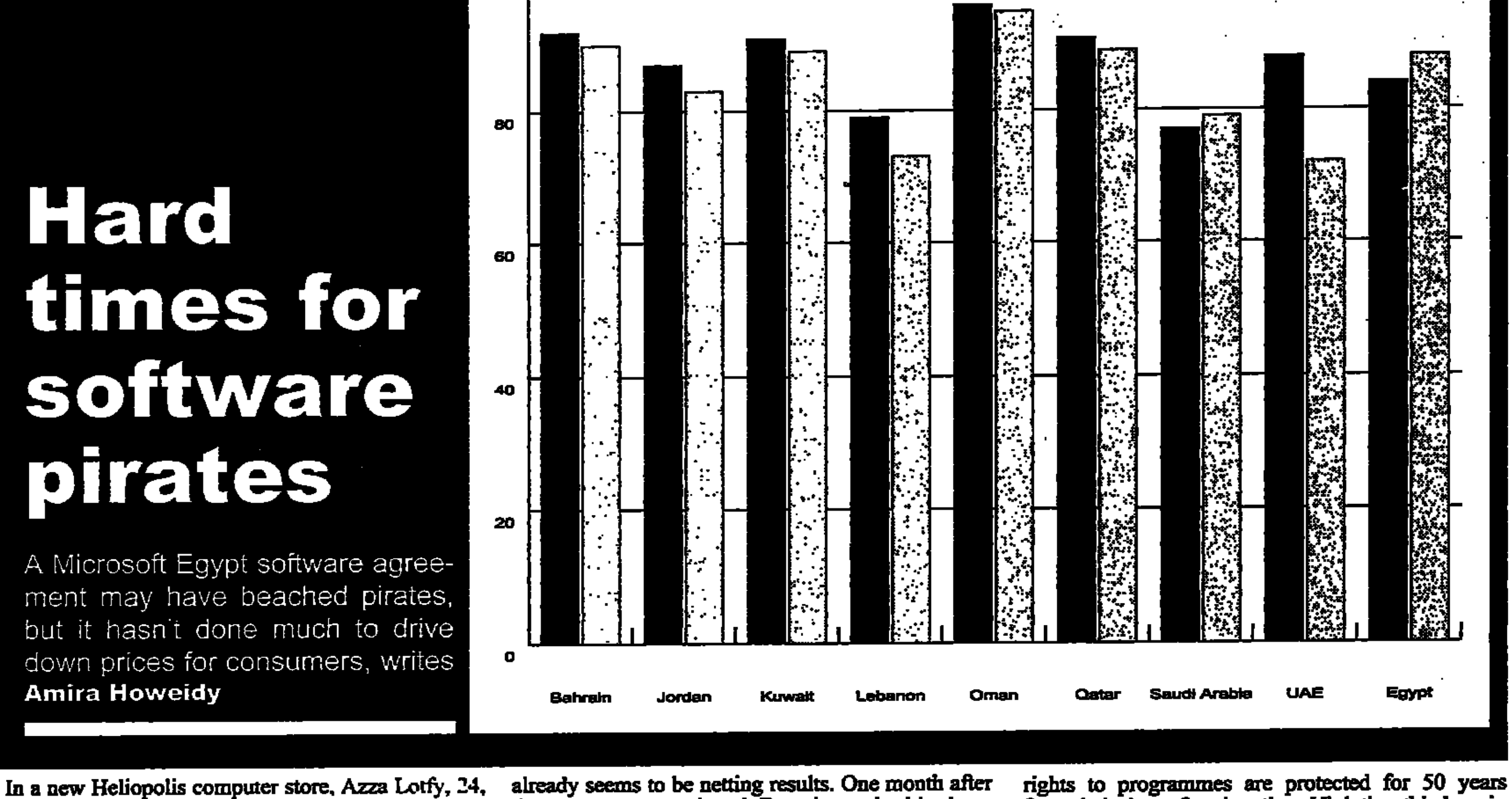
Textile symposium

THE GERMAN-Arab Chamber of Commerce will hold a symposium on ready-made garments and textile manufacturing technology in Cologne, Germany this week.

The symposium, held mainly for the benefit of German businessmen, seeks to highlight the fact that "the region is an important market for German machines and expertise in the field of ready-made garments and textiles," said Peter Geophrich, the chamber's executive director.

"Most countries in the Middle East and North Africa have established an important textile and clothing industry, partly to satisfy local demand, but mainly in order to export," he said.

The event is organised in coordination with the German Chambers of Commerce in the Middle East and North Africa region.



Hard times for software pirates

A Microsoft Egypt software agreement may have beached pirates, but it hasn't done much to drive down prices for consumers, writes **Amira Howeidy**

In a new Heliopolis computer store, Azza Lotfy, 24, stood before shelves stocked with the latest computer games and software, shaking her head in frustration.

"They (the programmes) are still too expensive," she said. "Why would I spend nearly a month's salary on a programme when I can get it for much less elsewhere — even if it is pirated."

After the software giant Microsoft signed an agreement with the Egyptian government in late August, aimed at enforcing software copyright laws, individual consumers expected a significant decrease in software prices. They were disappointed.

According to Ehab Mostafa, Microsoft Egypt's sales manager, the US software giant's agreement with Egypt seeks to break up a lucrative, $500 million per year, piracy industry in the Middle East. But it also targets three main groups in Egypt as being the primary beneficiaries: educational institutions, the government and training centres.

"Individual consumers are not on our priority list right now," said Mostafa.

What the agreement has accomplished is that the "booming local software market now enjoys unprecedented protections," he added.

The Microsoft Egypt initiative addresses a number of areas including local production of software; a 70 per cent discount on sales to all educational institutions in Egypt; multiple licensing on the same programme and support in the Egyptian government's implementation of its copyright education and enforcement campaign.

The copyright enforcement side of the agreement already seems to be netting results. One month after the agreement was signed, Egyptian authorities have raided seven companies, seizing in the busts thousands of counterfeit CD-ROM disks valued at $590,000, said Ashok Sharma, Middle East director of the Business Software Alliance (BSA) — an organisation which represents major software manufacturers. The cases against these companies, of which some had advertised in the newspapers that they pirated software, are now being handled by the district attorney's office.

"These were quality raids," said Sharma, adding that "the (piracy) situation is changing very quickly."

And, say multinational software company officials, the change has come not a moment too soon. BSA estimates put losses for international software manufacturers as a result of piracy in 1996 at $511 million. Of this figure, piracy in Egypt accounted for roughly $80 million.

In a bid to curb copyright infringement crimes, the BSA has set up telephone hotlines to encourage people who purchased pirated software to name the place from which they purchased the programme. The group offers a reward of up to $600 for information leading to a successful bust.

This system, coupled with a newfound vigour by Interior Ministry officials to pursue copyright violators, software industry officials hope, will be the bane of piraters.

But the fact of the matter is that the legislation to battle this crime has existed since 1993. Under Law 38, which amended the Copyrights Law of 1954, the rights to programmes are protected for 50 years from their date of registration. Violating this law, in the past, theoretically brought with it a three year jail sentence, an LE10,000 ($3,300) fine and, possibly, the closure of the company accused of piracy.

What has now changed is that there are incentives to compliance with the agreement. Interior Ministry officials have now also been trained by the BSA in differentiating between pirated and licensed software — a skill they lacked in the past.

Since the agreement was signed, more than 130 computer training centres approached Microsoft for licences, and 30 would-be software houses, encouraged by the new terms, have also filed for licences.

The deal offered by Microsoft is simple: "Buy one original software package, at a discount, and get ten licences almost for free," said Microsoft's Mostafa.

The company has also offered to license all pirated software owned by the government, dating back to 1992. Any new software produced now will be offered at a 50 per cent discount to the government and the public sector, said Mostafa.

In return for these perks, the Egyptian government has slashed import duties on software from their current level of 30 per cent to a modest five per cent.

While consumers are still out in the cold in terms of a decrease in the price of the software in the near future, local production of CD-ROMs and software should eventually push down the prices.

A local partner for CD-ROM production, said Mostafa, "may not get the technological know-how, but by producing the software locally, there will be no taxes, import duties or shipping costs."

Dial Egypt for profits

From catering to whimsical tastes or undertaking multi-million dollar projects, multinationals are targeting Egypt as the biggest market in the region, writes **Aziza Sami**

Liberalisation drives by Egypt and other Arab countries have drawn the attention of multinational telecommunications companies seeking to stake their claim in the many telecommunication infrastructure projects to be set up over the next two decades.

The opportunities are clearly there. Middle Eastern and African countries are expected to spend more than $30 billion on their communication infrastructure and service market by the year 2010, and much of this will be in the form of new wireless technology.

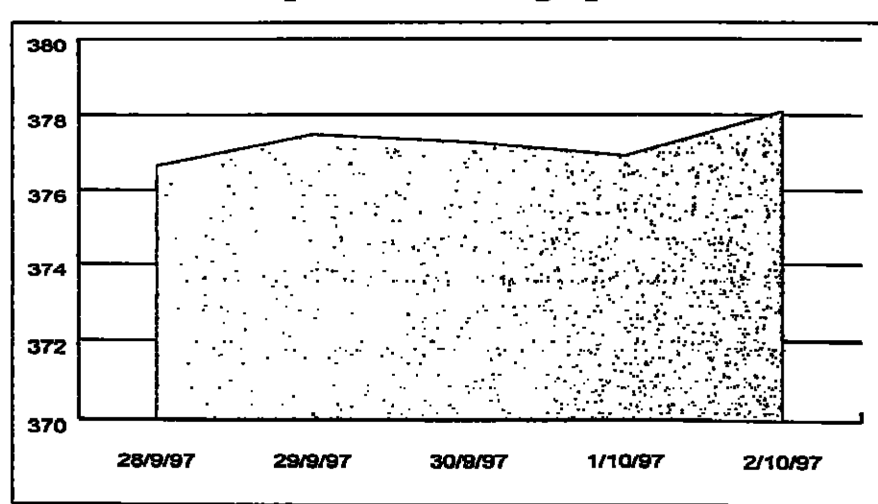
Egypt has already taken some significant steps in this field, spending several billion dollars on the upgrading of its telecommunications systems. Telecommunications is considered a major part of the country's economic reform programme, launched in 1992.

The country's latest step, taken last November, was the installation of its Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM). The cellular system, which began in Cairo, was recently expanded to Alexandria and is scheduled to reach Upper Egypt with the third and final phase of coverage, expected within the next year. Several multinationals have jumped on Egypt's cellular bandwagon, with AT&T, Siemens and Alcatel leading the pack. These companies, who entered the market early, have managed to enjoy a competitive edge also by securing the licence to sell mobile phones by companies such as Nokia and Motorola. Motorola opened a regional office in Cairo this year, with the aim of expanding into the Middle East market as a whole.

Sales of mobile phones have taken off in Egypt over the last couple of years, in many estimates exceeding sales in the oil-rich Gulf states. Although the mobile phones — considered a luxury item — were practically unseen a couple of years ago in Egypt — they seem to have caught on. Their price has dropped significantly from about LE3,000 when they were first introduced to about LE800 for some basic phones currently available on the market. Now, manufacturers seem to be able to cater for the whimsical as well, considering Egypt a prime consumer market. Ironically, despite the lower per capita income in Egypt which is estimated at $1000 — compared to that of the oil-rich Gulf states — which is almost 14 fold, it might soon outstrip its rich neighbours as a consumer in the GSM market. For instance, a new version of small and trendy handsets coming in all colours of the rainbow has been launched by Alcatel in Egypt, targeting "young people and women rather than professional businessmen" said Syivain Dolla, Alcatel's Mobile Phones Department area sales manager. "We decided to launch the handsets in Egypt rather than the Gulf because the market here is very large and still growing".

Market report

GDRs paint rosy picture



FOR THE NINTH consecutive week the General Market Index has maintained its upward trend, gaining 1.19 points to close at 376.91 for the week ending 2 October. The total value of transactions also increased, increasing from LE256 million the week before to LE292 million.

Trading in the shares of Misr International Bank (MIB) accounted for 7.35 per cent of the total transactions. Brokers attributed this to rumours that MIB plans to merge with Misr Exterior Bank. MIB's stock, over a week of trading, gained LE11.49 per share to close at LE602.38. Trading in the shares of the Olympic Financial Investments Group cornered 24.9 per cent of overall market turnover. Its stock gained LE2.8 to close at LE15.54.

In the manufacturing sector, shares of the Egypt Iron and Steel Company recorded an impressive 15.75 per cent increase in their value, and closed at LE8.82, while Alexandria National Iron and Steel recorded a 12.57 per cent loss to close at LE164.

On the London Stock Exchange, a three million Global Depository Receipt offering for the Paints and Chemical Industrials closed 15 times over-subscribed. The shares sold at $11.75.

In all, the shares of 62 companies increased in value, 64 decreased and 30 remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



blic banks

Dial Egypt for profit

Sami

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

The revival of parliamentary and constitutional government in Turkey in 1908, after a hiatus of 31 years, filled Egyptians with hope for reforms in their own country. Four Egyptians, mostly of Turkish origins, were admitted into the Turkish Council of Delegates, but as Dr Yunan Labib Rizq reveals through the pages of *Al-Ahram*, Egyptian nationalists demanded more

2 0 3

On 25 July 1908, *Al-Ahram* announced to its readers, "The Council of Delegates (the Turkish Parliament) has awoken from its 31 year slumber. Long live the Ottoman Empire. Long live the East. Long live liberty, brotherhood and freedom. There followed, in large font, the telegram that, in the words of *Al-Ahram*, "caused 30 million hearts to jump with joy."

The telegram said: "It is the royal decree to restore the Council of Delegates and orders have been issued to proceed with the measures to hold elections for that purpose."

While on the surface the news seemed only to effect Turkey, it had a profound impact on Egyptian politics over the following months, as is evidenced in the extensive coverage in the Egyptian press, notably *Al-Ahram*. Although *Al-Ahram* had become thoroughly Egyptianised over the three decades since its founding, it was still concerned with promoting Egypt's links with the Sublime Porte, the affiliation that had originally provided the Levantine owners of *Al-Ahram* with the legal sanction, as Ottoman subjects, to move to Egypt and start their newspaper.

The news of the restitution inspired a collective sigh of relief. The 31-year slumber to which *Al-Ahram* referred was the period that had elapsed since the Ottoman state had instituted its first attempts at constitutional reform in the late 1870s. Shortly after Ottoman Sultan Abdel-Hamid II came to power in a palace coup, he suspended the Turkish constitution and abrogated the authorities of the parliament. Although Egypt's national press, including *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Liwa*, and *Al-Mu'ayyid*, felt a certain allegiance to Abdel-Hamid II, based on Ottoman and Islamic loyalties, they could not turn a blind eye to the police state that this sultan had instituted. It was thus with a certain jubilation that *Al-Ahram* celebrated "the *restoration of constitutional* rule in Turkey" and noted that the first demand of the officers who had mounted the constitutional coup was "amnesty for the tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians who have been exiled or suffer imprisonment in Turkey's prisoners for no crime of their own other than having been the object of slander and defamation."

Equally important for understanding the Egyptian reaction is the Ottoman Sultan's policies toward the European powers. *Hardly had he ascended to the* throne than Abdel-Hamid II had to cope with the consequences of defeat in a war with Russia.

The humiliating truce of 1877 would have caused even greater damage to the integrity of the Ottoman Empire were it not for the intervention of European powers in the Berlin conference of 1878, the conference which laid the groundwork for dividing up Ottoman possessions. In order to counter the disintegration of the empire, Abdel-Hamid II pursued a two-pronged policy. On the *one hand, he* attempted to play the European powers off against each other. On the other, he instituted a policy of pan-Islamism, intended to create a powerful ideological bond that would thwart the attempts of European powers to divide up Ottoman imperial possessions among themselves.

As for the Party of Union and Progress which had mounted the coup, *Al-Ahram* writes on 8 March 1909 that it was founded in 1894 by a number of students in the Imperial Medical Corps and was joined by "a collection of prominent Ottoman officers and intellectuals who worked tirelessly and clandestinely to deliver their country from despotism."

Egypt at the time of the restitution of the constitution in Turkey was not the same Egypt it had been when Abdel-Hamid II suspended the same constitution. Egypt of 1908 had political parties. Some of these, such as the Nationalist Party retained an Ottoman affiliation, while others, such as the Umma Party, re*jected the Ottoman allegiance and af*firmed their purely Egyptian identity. Egypt of 1908 was also suffering the strains of British occupation. It was only natural that Egyptians looked to the new developments in Istanbul for an answer to their plight. There was also a growing constitutional movement in Egypt and the constitutional coup in Turkey fuelled hopes of parliamentary reform at home. Finally, for some time Egypt had been host to numerous refugees from Abdel-Hamid's despotism. The sight of the jubilant exiles packing their belongings to return to their country added a poignant counterpoint to the Egyptians yearnings for freedom and independence.

The restitution of constitutional life in Turkey sparked a heated debate in the Egyptian press. According to the Turkish constitution, Egyptians as members of the Ottoman Empire, at least nominally, had the right to stand for election to the new parliament in Istanbul. For the next few months, the controversy over whether or not to participate reverberated through the echelons of political parties as it did in the pages of *Al-Ahram*. The latter forum attracted well-known personalities such as Mahmoud Bek Anis and Hassan Bek Moussa El-Aqqad as well as ordinary individuals such as Hassan Nassouh, and a man who wrote under the name Barhuma.

An article by Mahmoud Bek Anis of the Nationalist Party, "Egyptians in the Council of Delegates," occupies most of the front page of *Al-Ahram*'s 14 August edition. Egypt was still subject to Otto*man suzerainty, the author insisted*. For example, he writes, "Egypt is obliged to send a specific number of soldiers to fight for the Ottoman state in times of war. Also, the government in Istanbul appoints the religious commissioner who adjudicates on Egyptian personal status laws. As long as such is the case, he argues, "why should Egypt not have representatives to voice our opinions regarding the welfare of the Ottoman state and the Egyptian government?" Egyptian representation would generate solidarity between the Egyptians and the Ottomans and provide Egypt with an effective forum for voicing its cause, he said.

Hassan Bek Moussa El-Aqqad disagreed. His response to Anis came in the form of three questions: Firstly, he asked, can we find 150 high-ranking Egyptians who would be willing to leave their business affairs and move to Istanbul in order to serve as our representatives and deliberate on issues involving a country of which they are unfamiliar? Secondly, should that parliament issue resolutions concerning Egypt, who will we find in Egypt to implement these resolutions? Thirdly, will the Turkish people accept 150 Egyptians in their parliament — equivalent to a third of the total membership — when their presence is unlikely to benefit neither them nor us?

Even as contention in Egypt over the issue was at its most vehement, preparations were under way in Turkey to form the new parliament. It was rumoured in Istanbul that Turkish government planned to appoint a number of Egyp*tians as members of parliament. The* most notable name mentioned was that of Mustafa Fadel Pasha, grandson of Mohammed Ali.

The rumours proved true. Three Egyptians were appointed to the Turkish parliament. These were, in addition to Mustafa Fadel, Khalil Pasha Hamada, director-general of the *awqaf* (religious endowments) and Prince Said Pasha Halim. *Al-Ahram* commented, "After all, Egyptians are Ottoman subjects. If an Egyptian is appointed to a position in the Ottoman government no one can oppose his appointment on the grounds that he is an outsider." In this case, *Al-Ahram* twisted the truth slightly. All three individuals were Egyptian by virtue of their connection with the ruling family or Turkish aristocracy, but they all had Turkish origins. Their appointment was hardly a proof of Egyptian representation in the Turkish parliament.

More significant than the representation of Egyptians in the Turkish parliament was the impact of the constitutional coup on domestic politics in Egypt. On 3 August 1908 Hassan Nassouh wrote to *Al-Ahram* saying that "the Egyptian question has entered a new phase with the restitution of the Turkish parliament, bringing its solution within reach." The restitution of the Turkish parliament, he argued, signalled the end of discord within the Ottoman Empire which had always run contrary to the interests of Egypt and the empire. Yet, while many Egyptians were speculating, a prominent figure in the new Ottoman regime announced to the London *Times*, "The Egyptian question and pan-Islam are not on the agenda of our party." The announcement came as a shock to those who had their hopes pinned on the Party of Union and Progress.

The ethnocentrism of the new Turkish *regime soon began to reveal itself*, dispelling remaining hopes in other parts of the empire. Beneath the headline, "The Arabs, the Ottomans and the Constitutional Government," *Al-Ahram* vehemently criticised the policies of the new Turkish government. The Party of Union and Progress upon which so many hopes had been pinned, has neglected the role the Arabs played in their movement."

In the end, the only gain the Egyptians won from the coup in Turkey was that one British argument against Egypt having a constitution was undermined. No longer could the British say that since the Ottomans, the titular rulers of Egypt, had no constitution, Egypt could not have one.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Money & Business

Non-farm payroll — Inflation — Dow Jones — GDP

Federation participates in Beirut conference

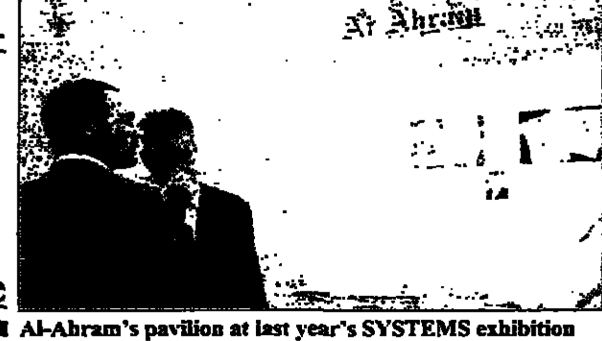
A DELEGATION from the *Egyptian Federation of Chambers of Commerce* will participate in the Arab Investors Conference to be held in the Lebanese capital of Beirut on 18 October. Leading the delegation will be Mahmoud El-Arabi, head of the federation, while twenty prominent Egyptian businessmen and investors will comprise the remainder of the delegation, said Khalid Ismail, deputy head of the federation, who added that a special symposium will be held during the conference on promoting investment in Egypt, especially within the framework of the national plan for Upper Egypt and Sinai.

Egypt has it all

SPONSORED by the Ministry of Trade and Development; the International Fairs and Exhibitions Authority; the Centre for Egyptian Export Development; the Australian Embassy in Egypt and the Egyptian Embassy in Australia, an Egyptian exhibition and conference will be held in Australia from 10-13 November at the Sydney International Conference Centre. The conference will deal with investment and commercial opportunities in Egypt, as well as highlight the great strides Egyptian industry has made in recent times.

The exhibition, Egypt Has It All, will showcase Egyptian products with the aim of opening up the Australian market for increasing export activity.

ACITEX from 18-21 February 1998 at the Cairo International Conference Centre

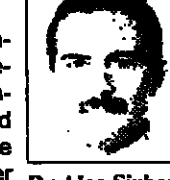


Al-Ahram's pavilion at last year's SYSTEMS exhibition

AS A result of the great success of the SYSTEMS exhibition, the Munich Exhibition Organisation have decided to organise this fair annually which will take place in Munich from 27-31 October 1997. This exhibition is considered one of the most important exhibitions specialised in the field of data technology and telecommunications on an international level. Of similar importance is the 6th Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition (ACITEX) which will take place from 18-21 February 1998 at the Cairo International Conference Centre, held simultaneously with the 6th International Conference on Artificial Intelligence. Management of both SYSTEMS and ACITEX are cooperating for the second year in a row, keen on exchanging expertise and knowledge, especially that ACITEX is a major competitor for presenting the latest in the fields of computers and information technology.

Al-Ahram's pavilion at SYSTEMS will offer complete information on ACITEX and the Artificial Intelligence Conference to the 100,000 visitors and 1,731 exhibitors that are expected to attend.

Environmental expert in Florida



Dr Alaa Sirhan

DR ALAA Sirhan, environmental economist, member of the environmental department of the Specialised National Councils and representative of the United Nations environmental programme at the Arab League, has returned to Egypt after giving a series of lectures at Florida State University in the United States. The lectures dealt with the environment and the Egyptian experience in development.

National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE Securities Market Index from 28 September to 2 October 1997

Closing On 2/10/1997 410.55

The NBE Index has increased 0.74 points to register 410.55 points for the week ending 2/10/1997 against 409.81 points for the previous week ending 25/9/1997.

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Changes %	Company	Changes %
El-Qahira Pharmeceutical and Chemical Co.	6.7+	Alexandria Pharmeceutical Co.	5.7-
El-Said Contracting Co.	4.2+	Suez Canal Bank	5-
Misr El-Gadida for Housing Co.	2.2+	Egyptian Electric Cable Co.	4.6-
Société Financiere et Industrielle d'Egypte	2+	Kabo	4.2-

Egypt participates in Mediterranean-European conference

EGYPT participated in a Mediterranean-European conference for the textile and ready-made clothes industries, held in Cologne, Germany, on 9 October.

Dr. Peter Gopfresch, executive director of the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce in Cairo and organiser of the conference, said that the conference is being organised by the chamber in cooperation with the German Chamber of Commerce for the Middle East and North Africa. Participating in the conference will be representatives from private sector textile and ready-made clothes industries in Egypt, Jordan and Turkey, in addition to a number of German companies operating in similar fields.

The conference will acquaint attendees with the latest technological developments in the field, and shed light on the future of trade between Germany and Mediterranean countries, especially in light of the fact that Germany is one of the biggest importers of ready-made clothes and textiles from the Middle East.

Gopfresch explained that textiles and ready-made clothes are prime candidates for becoming the most important exports to Europe, especially in wake of numerous Mediterranean-European cooperative agreements, international trade liberalisation and the implementation of the GATT, which will increase competition in the field. He added that the textile and ready-made clothes industry in Egypt will be prepared for this stage after acquiring the latest technology and will open new markets by increasing the quality and reducing costs to make the industry more competitive in the European market.

Opera *Aida* press office in Luxor 10-16 October

THE CAIRO Opera House, in cooperation with the State Information Service, has established a press centre in Luxor to serve all media members attending the Opera *Aida* in Luxor.

"We are expecting more than 300 representatives of international media, representing press, print and electronic media, to attend and cover this unique and spectacular performance," said Dr. Nasser El-Ansary, chairman of the Cairo Opera House. "A qualified staff who speak English, French, German and Italian will run the office to give the best service to the press," he added.

In addition, the office will be fully equipped with all the necessary equipment such as faxes, computers, printers, photocopier machines, access to the Internet, international telephone lines etc, to better serve media guests.

The press office will operate from 10-16 October and will be located at:

Mercure Luxor Hotel (known as the ETAP Hotel)

Address; Corniche El-Nil, Luxor

Telephone numbers: (095) 380 944/374 944

Fax number: (095) 374 912

For more information, please contact:

RadaResearch and Public Relations Company in Cairo

Tel. (202) 2917956/2915437

Fax. (202) 2917563

E-mail: rrpr@intouch.com

Twenty four years ago Egypt fought to liberate Sinai. Since then, it has sought to utilise the same spirit that made the historic crossing of the Suez Canal in October '73 possible, for reconstruction, in Sinai and throughout the country. **Dina Ezzat** reviews the record of achievements, in the peninsula, as well as in the heart of Cairo. On the opposite page, **Omayma Abdel-Latif** goes south to celebrate Egypt's Nubian heritage

Reclaiming Sinai, again and forever

Two projects which will enable the development of the Sinai Peninsula are high on the government's agenda. One, the El-Salam Canal, which will take Nile water from the west of the Delta to Sinai, is near completion. The second, a bridge that will cross the Suez Canal connecting the peninsula to the mainland, is not far behind. The schemes are the main pre-requisites for the development of the land that Egypt fought and negotiated to regain from the hands of the Israelis.

By the early years of the coming Millennium the government hopes that these projects will be completed and that millions of Egyptians will move to the area, thus reducing the pressure on the vastly over-populated Nile Valley.

The government has prepared a national plan for the development of Sinai which aims to better integrate the peninsula, both economically and socially, with the mainland. The plan is also intended to make the peninsula a more attractive investment opportunity.

Central to the implementation of this plan is the huge task of getting Nile water to Sinai's arid land.

Early in the 1970s, the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources initiated work on El-Salam Canal that begins in Damietta, to the east of the Nile Delta, and carries the water eastwards, through the governorates of Damietta, El-Sharqqiyah, Ismailia and North Sinai to Wadi El-Arish in the heart of Sinai.

The Nile water will be siphoned under the Suez Canal in four concrete tubes. "As the water approaches the Suez Canal it will pass through these tubes and then be pumped up on the other side," explained Abdel-Wahab Qenawi, the supervising engineer.

The canal will carry the water for about 242km across the country and will allow the farming of some 600,000 feddans, about two thirds of which will be in Sinai.

This month, President Hosni Mubarak will give the go-ahead for the pumping of Nile water into Sinai. They will initially carry water across a few kilometres of Sinai — in the Governorate of Port Said. By the early years of the next century the water should reach Wadi El-Arish.

"But it is not going to go further east; there is no talking at all about taking this water to Israel," said one official. He added, "We simply do not have the water resources; and honestly I do not think that the political leadership would want to do this."

All measures necessary to ensure the success of this project were undertaken, said Atiah Hashish, a senior director of the project. Comprehensive studies of the nature of the land and of potential crops were made, areas that were occupied by the Israelis were cleared of all landmines and information on the new farmland was made available to the new owners.

"The land which will be farmed in Sinai thanks to this new water supply will only be sold to Egyptians," asserted one official who asked for his name to be withheld. "The purpose of the project is to populate Sinai with Egyptians, not to allow people from other nationalities to inhabit the land there."

The rule is that new graduates and small farmers can buy up to 10 feddans each, while an investor can purchase up to 500 feddans. Major investors who show enough financial credit to undertake large-scale agriculture projects could buy more.

When completed, which should be by the year 2004, El-Salam Canal should carry some 11 million cubic metres of water which could irrigate the targeted 600,000 feddans.

Over the last few years, agricultural activities have already started on the east side of the Delta. Farmers who cultivated land on the banks of El-Salam Canal report that their endeavors have been successful.

Abbas Hosni, a 50-year-old farmer, is one example.

Hosni used to be a tenant farmer. "I never thought I could buy my own land; I just farmed other people's land," he said. A few years ago, Hosni managed to save up and buy a few feddans next to a branch of El-Salam Canal in El-Sharqiyyah. "The land was so horrible, it was such a mess that nobody believed it could produce a crop," he recalled. But after two years of work by Hosni, his wife and his children, he managed to sow seeds for the first time. The first year the harvest was not great but things got better. "Now we have our own land, a house that we built and we run our lives," said Hosni's wife.

It is this kind of success story that officials hope will be common in Sinai once the water arrives. But officials realise that for farmers to go and cultivate land on the peninsula an efficient transportation system, to carry crops which are to be sold or exported, is a necessity.

Indeed, the development plan for Sinai concluded that there was urgent need for the construction of a bridge across the Suez Canal.

According to government sources, without this bridge the development of Sinai would be almost impossible. Traffic forecasts suggest that serious expansion in Sinai will mean that at least 50,000 vehicles will need to cross between Sinai and the mainland each day. It was decided to build a four-lane bridge over the Suez Canal and Qantara was selected as a suitable site, ensuring the free and safe passage of international shipping through the canal.

The Japanese government agreed to give Egypt a grant of 10 billion Yen to build the bridge. A Japanese construction company will build the main body of the bridge over the water, while Egyptian contractors will build the approach sections on the east and west banks.

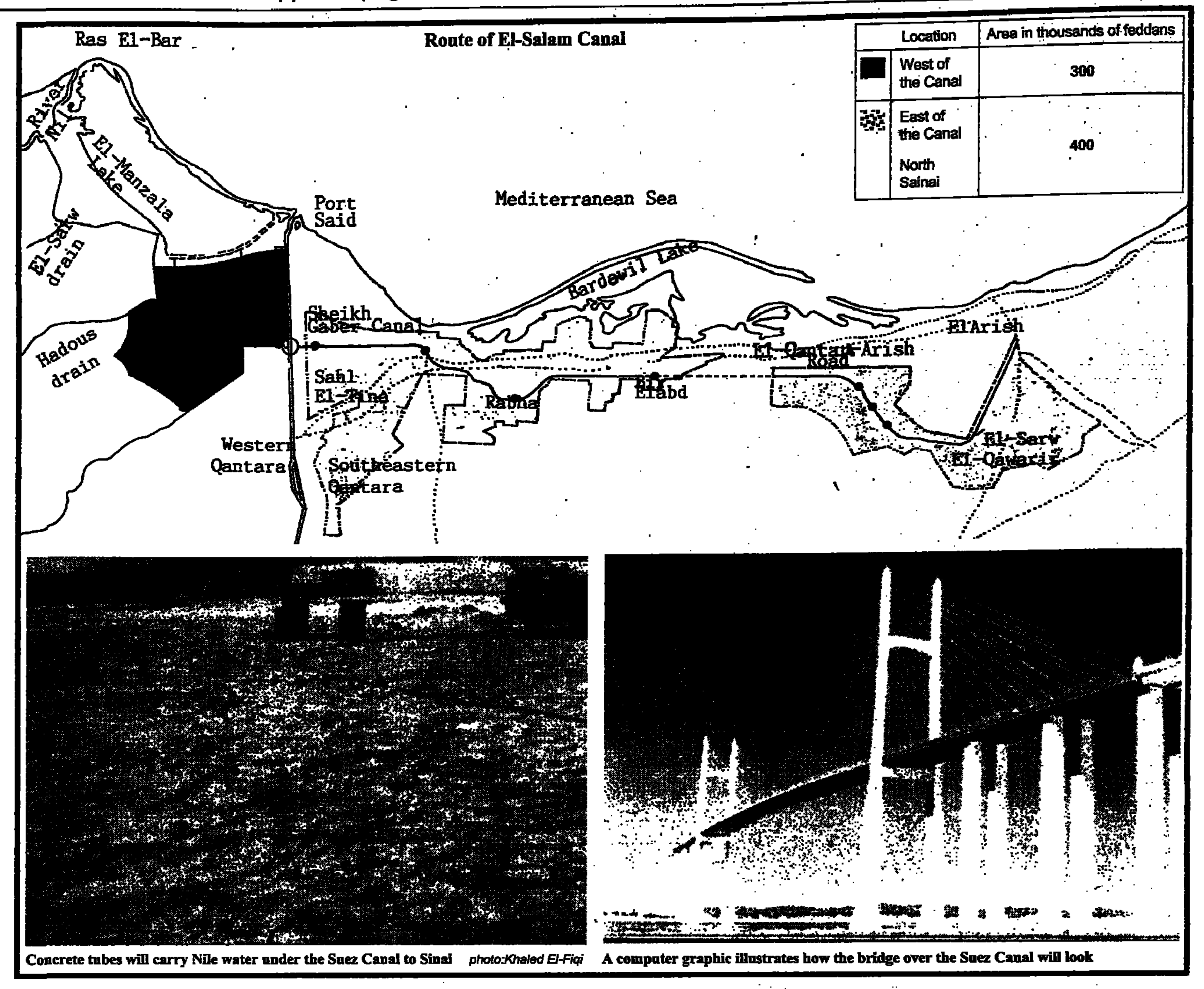
"The Japanese government looks at that bridge as a symbol of peace; in war times we could not build bridges because we feared that they would be shelled," said one Japanese diplomat. "But now peace has come to the Middle East; it is, we think, a new era, the bridge will help to consolidate trade relations among the countries of the region."

Construction work on the approach section is in its initial phase. The Japanese will start working on their part by the end of this year.

The main 20 metre-wide bridge will hang about 70 metres above the water of the canal. "This is enough space for any large ship or supertanker; even an aircraft carrier could go under it," affirmed the designer's report.

When completed, by the year 2002, the bridge will serve the needs of El-Salam Canal and the petroleum and mining projects in Sinai.

With its numerous fishing sites, mineral mines, tourism developments and potential agricultural areas, the Sinai has much to offer. The new bridge and canal, together with a healthy infrastructure network, should help encourage investment and provide job opportunities in the peninsula.



Concrete tubes will carry Nile water under the Suez Canal to Sinai *photo:Khaled El-Fiqi*

A computer graphic illustrates how the bridge over the Suez Canal will look

Flying over and tunnelling under Cairo

Projects for modernising the capital are moving into the fast lane. **Dina Ezzat** explores Cairo's rapidly growing three-tier system



The suspended section of the 6 October flyover will carry traffic high above the crowded capital *photo:Sherif Sonbol*

Crowded downtown Cairo is slowly but surely changing its appearance.

"Bus terminals have been moved nearer to the main underground station, some routes have been blocked to allow for the flow of cars coming off the flyovers," said taxi driver Ali Hamza, who has worked around the capital's streets for more than 30 years. Today, Hamza is bemused by the transformation around him.

As Cairo acquires new flyovers and a new underground metro system, the city's topography changes. "When I look around me, I cannot believe what I am seeing. Cairo is now on so many levels that I could be driving on a flyover and see right into someone's living room," said the driver.

The heart of Cairo has indeed undergone a by-pass operation. The metro and 6 October Bridge are perhaps the main developments to have transformed the city from how it was when Hamza first began driving.

Not long after last September's inauguration of another extension to the underground system, Cairo is to witness the opening of an extension of the 6 October Bridge.

Both projects start off in Giza, cut through the bottle-necks of downtown Cairo, peak into a focal connecting point near Ramsis square and then slide down the suburbs of Heliopolis and Nasr City.

The recently-opened section of the underground links Ataba and Abdeen squares to Ramsis and Tahrir squares.

Open to the public on 23 September, this section is the second phase of the second line of the metro which begins in Shubra El-Kheima.

On this 3km-long section, 322 train trips are run a day. They join the already operating services to shuttle over 1.2 million people between Helwan, El-Marg (at the far end of Heliopolis), Shubra El-Kheima and El-Ataba.

Meanwhile the new extension to the 6 October flyover is scheduled to be officially opened by President Hosni Mubarak some time this month. It will open to the public later in October. The route will take drivers from Dokki or Tahrir on to Ramsis via a 1.5km ride which passes through Port Said Street, near Ataba.

This extension has been, for the engineers and builders on site, one of the most challenging phases of the flyover since construction began in 1969.

At one point in Ghamra, a few kilometres north of Ramsis Square, it was impossible to install the frames on which the body of the bridge was to be constructed. The simple reason was that the ground was too overburdened with sewage, electricity cables and underground lines.

A suspension bridge was the answer. Indeed, 168 metres of this section of the bridge is supported by 22 cables that are anchored to two pylons.

The new extensions of the underground and the 6 October Bridge should, to some extent, ease the traffic jams that block Cairo streets, particularly in the downtown squares, as they will enable commuters to steer clear of the busiest areas.

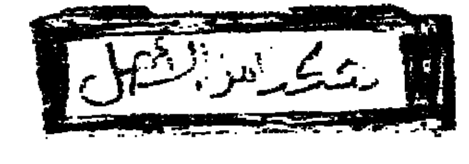
Still, the major breakthrough will only take place in the year 2000. By this date the underground metro service should reach the suburbs of Giza, north of Cairo University, and the 6 October Bridge should cut through the crowded Abbassiya district to allow drivers coming from Giza to ride on the flyover down to Salah Salem Street and on to Heliopolis and Nasr City.

"It is certain that both projects have changed the face of the city a great deal," said Adel Ayoub, senior vice-chairman of the Arab Contractors, the company which has been responsible for both projects.

Indeed, photos of Cairo in the early 1960s show a very different city from the one seen today.

Buildings, some of them of obvious aesthetic value, have been removed to allow for these mega-projects. Car parks have been built and pedestrian bridges have been replaced in several areas with pedestrian tunnels.

The heart of the city that was once meant to be an architectural replica of some beautiful European city is now what taxi drivers call a "city with three floors": the underground for the metro, the street for pedestrians and buses, and the flyovers for private cars.





Sixty-year-old Ewiss, the Nubian gate-keeper of the museum, has seen his dream of a place to celebrate his people's culture come true

photos:Randa Shaath

Nubia lives

The Nubia Museum in Aswan has had a long gestation period, but is at last to be officially opened next month. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports on Nubia's part in the government's scheme to move southward and the museum's role in resuscitating a unique civilisation

Old Nubia may lie underneath the waters of Lake Nasser, behind the Aswan High Dam, its natural and human-made beauty *gone forever, but for 35-year-old Usama* Abdel-Wareth, much of Nubia remains: in the mud brick walls of villages in Nagaa El-Mahatta and Nagaa El-Quba in western Aswan, in the fields, the date-palm groves, the water wheels and the old men who still recount stories of the "Lost Paradise". Most importantly, he believes Nubia will be reborn in the museum which will house as many as 3,000 rare Nubian artefacts, *dating* from prehistoric to modern times, and is due to open next month.

"True, the land is long gone, drowned in the world's largest artificial lake, but Nubia will not remain just a memory. The opening of the new museum in Aswan will mark a civilisation reborn," said Abdel-Wareth who will soon assume his responsibilities as the director of the new museum.

The opening of the Nubia Museum, coming at a time when the country is celebrating the 24th anniversary of the October War, emphasises the fact that the extreme south of the country, an integral part of Egypt for thousands of years, is once again the focus of government attention. "It's a part of the overall scheme recently adopted by the government to move southwards, not only in terms of economic development, but also heritage and cultural development," said Ahmed Nawar, head of the Museums Department at the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA).

Culture Minister Farouk Hosni said that the museum's keys will be handed to him on October 9th to mark the end of construction work and pave the way for a pre-grand opening *rehearsal. President* Hosni Mubarak will officially inaugurate the museum next month at a grand celebration attended by leaders of the states which contributed to salvaging the Nubian antiquities.

"The Nubia museum symbolises the international cooperation in the field of preserving heritage at its best." Hosni told reporters on Monday.

The need to set up a *museum* to house the antiquities of Nubia became apparent even before the beginning of UNESCO's archaeological salvage operation in the 1960s, but remained dormant until the completion of the dam and even then took time to get off the ground.

The original contract was signed in 1976, but work only began in the mid-eighties when the Egyptian government asked UNESCO to help launch an international campaign to set up a museum for the display of objects saved from Nubia, along with others transferred from Egypt's major museums.

In 1986, an Egyptian contracting company, Hassan Alam, began work on the first phase of the plan at a cost of LE10 million. But five years later, due to financial disputes between *the* company and the SCA, all construction ground to a halt.

It wasn't until 1996 that work began on the second phase of the project, which included selecting objects for display, display cases and installing appropriate lighting. With just weeks to go before the grand opening, finishing touches are *still frantically* being made to the LE50 million project, but all seems to be going to plan.



The architecture of the Nubia museum blends in with the surrounding environment





A Nubian woman (left) doing traditional basketry work, while the statue of Ramses II, the centre-piece of the museum, is still cloaked in hessian

True enough, the Nubia Museum is meant to crown the salvage work of the 1960s. But Abdel-Wareth says it is not designed to represent the Nubians and their culture as an endangered species whose culture is extinct. "Nubian culture *remains a vital force* in Egypt. Nubian life continues in the villages, music, the henna nights of the wedding, and the language," Abdel-Wareth said. In fact, part of the role of the museum is to help act as a "living memory of Nubia and Nubian heritage rather than just a place to display some artifacts."

"It is meant to emphasise the relations that linked Egypt and Nubia throughout history and moreover it is designed to highlight the Egyptian identity of Nubians," archaeologist Sabri Abdel-Aziz explained. The rapid and sympathetic adoption of Egyptian culture in Nubia is unique in the ancient world. Egypt invested heavily in this change, building enormous temple complexes such as Abu Simbel that were at once centres of re*ligion*, culture, politics, and economy. In later centuries, this investment paid off as Nubia championed the Pharaonic faith in the face of forces of disruption, conquest and foreign rule in the Nile Valley.

Because the museum is linked to a people and a civilisation with a distinct culture, it will play a social role through its workshop where, says Abdel-Wareth, Nubian girls and boys will be taught how to read and write, as well as learn one of the traditional Nubian professions, such as basketry.

Additionally, the museum will house a department for ethnological studies and facilities for researchers of Nubian history, Abdel-Wareth said.

A heritage and a future

The Nubia Museum stands on a rocky slope of sandstone and granite overlooking an Ancient Egyptian granite quarry on one side and the Fatimid cemetery on the other, at the southern entrance to the city of Aswan, east of the Old Cataract Hotel.

The architectural plan was conceived by the late professor Mahmoud El-Hakim, who designed Luxor's museum. Traditional Nubian architecture has been used in the design of the facade, the windows and doors and a Nubian vault has been used at the main entrance, a design which dates back thousands of years and still survives today. It stands on a 50,000m plot of land, and in 1992, UNESCO assigned the renowned Mexican architect and former Mexican Minister of Culture Pedro Ramirez Vasques to design the museum gardens.

"The museum blends in with the surrounding environment and has been built at a low elevation so as not to distort the physical panorama," Nawar said, explaining that the plan incorporates stepped terraces, inspired by Ancient Egyptian architecture, which are in harmony with the stepped, rocky nature of the site.

The ground floor of the three-storey building contains the main exhibition hall, a diorama, reproductions of two Nubian houses and a huge painting depicting an old Nubian village complete with an original waterwheel. This part of the museum also includes a conservation and restoration workshop, laboratories, and an open-air amphitheatre.

A ramp leads to the main entrance where information and ticket offices, a gift shop, educational facilities, temporary exhibition halls, a lecture hall and VIP lounge can be found. The latter enjoys a direct view of the 77 domed Fatimid tombs to the north and access to the outdoor landscaped garden.

In the main hall, which is surrounded by an L-shaped mezzanine floor, a colossal statue of Ramses II forms the centrepiece of the museum. Some colour still remains on the statue, which is unlike most of this monarch's monoliths. "This one is carved of sandstone. It is eight metres high and its unusual proportions indicate that it was not made by the court sculptors but reflects the folk tradition of Nubia," said archeologist Sabry Abdel-Aziz.

The museum is designed to house more than three thousand items excavated from various sites in Nubia, not only during the salvage operation, but in earlier work from the turn of the 20th century. Many of these items were in the Egyptian, Coptic and Islamic museums in Cairo and the Aswan Museum on Elephantine Island, but the bulk had remained in temporary storage for the past three decades and *have never been on public display. Pieces* dating from prehistoric times right up to the early 1960s will be on display.

Perhaps the museum's greatest attraction is the royal collection discovered in Ballana near Abu Simbel by British archaeologist Walter Emery in 1931, unquestionably the richest find ever made in Nubia. Among the breathtaking objects are a massive silver crown that was found *resting on the head of a Nubian* monarch of the Nobodai tribe, and quartz, crystal and jasper beads that adorned his neck. When the collection was on display in the Egyptian Museum, it was seldom visited, overshadowed perhaps by Pharaonic royal treasures. Now it will receive the attention it deserves.

Other items on display include fifty items from the geological period, 622 from the Pharaonic period, 17 from the Graeco-Roman era, 213 items from Coptic times and 188 from the Islamic period. Altogether as many as 627 exhibits have been transported from the above-mentioned museums.

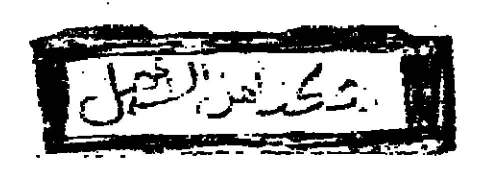
In the temporary exhibition hall, different collections will be given pride of place every six months, beginning with the display of the *Hakayeb* collection. This includes some 150 unique Middle Kingdom objects discovered by the late Egyptologist Labib Habashi in 1945 and never previously displayed.

Outdoor displays include 80 items taken from the Egyptian and Coptic museums, rock drawings from caves in Nubia, and items from the Kalabsha and Sebou areas.

As an ethno-archaeological museum, the outdoor area contains a replica of a prehistoric cave, adorned with paintings of animals that used to exist in the area, and a model of a traditional Nubian house with a watercourse and ponds alongside it irrigating traditional Nubian plants, reproduced in an attempt to depict Nubian daily life as it was before the flooding. Nubian folk music and dance will be performed in the open-air amphitheatre, and at time of writing, outdoor slide screenings, presentations of foreign archeological missions' publications and exhibitions of graphics on various topics are also being planned.

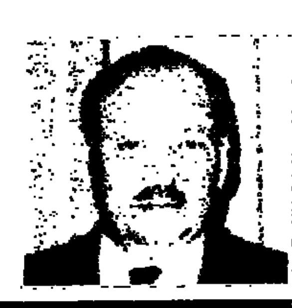


Artist Nagi Kamel designed a bronze medal in commemoration of the opening of the Nubia Museum. The medal depicts the traditional features of Nubian life; a typical house in the background with a portrait of a Nubian woman and a crown of one of Nubia's old kings engraved on it.



Siege from the seas

Hundreds of warplanes pounding Israeli positions in Sinai, thousands of infantrymen crossing the Suez Canal, huge water hoses being used to destroy the "invincible" Bar-Lev Line. These are some of the more prominent images of the October War. But what of the Egyptian Navy? **Rear Admiral Ashraf M Refaat** EN (Ret), former commander-in-chief of the Egyptian Naval Forces and chief of Naval Operations during the October War, describes the crucial, but little known, role the Navy played in securing victory 24 years ago, most notably, clamping a tight siege over sea supplies to Israel, and starving it of oil



Over the years much has been written about the 1973 October War, and most readers are probably familiar with the narrative of its main events. Above all there was the assault on the Suez Canal carried out against great odds: the waterway was crossed despite enemy resistance, the steep sand-bank erected by Israel all along the Canal was surmounted, and the Bar-Lev Line stormed. Within a few hours the brave Egyptian infantry troops were able to raise their nation's flag over almost all the defensive positions and strong points of the Bar-Lev Line. The massive and sudden air attack mounted during the first phase of these operations by over two hundred warplanes under the command of Air-Vice-Marshal Hosni Mubarak, now president of Egypt, is remembered by all as the spark which first set light to the flare of victory.

Known in Israel as the "Yom Kippur War", the October War was by no means the first round of hostilities between Egypt and Israel, but it was the first time that the Egyptian armed forces had planned an offensive war. For the first time realistic estimates were made of Israel's military capabilities, and the combat missions chosen were limited to those that were clearly within the capabilities of the Egyptian armed forces.

The main objective was to overrun the Suez Canal, destroy the Bar-Lev Line and establish solid beach-heads on the east bank in Sinai. This would bring about a substantial change in the military situation on the ground in Egypt's favour, making a negotiated resolution of the conflict possible. The Egyptian armed forces had the advantage of surprise. For the first time the Israelis found themselves fighting on both the Egyptian and Syrian fronts at the same time. Furthermore, this success led to a marked improvement in relationships with other Arab states, with the result that the Egyptian Navy was able to extend its combat activities into key strategic areas in both the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.

The Navy prepares for war:

Preparations for the 1973 war stretched back a number of years. Ever since the defeat of June 1967, the Egyptian armed forces had worked to achieve a high standard of combat readiness and increase their fighting capabilities. The Navy was in much better shape than the rest of the armed forces, having not suffered defeat in 1967. Standards of combat training, military discipline and will-to-fight were high.

The effectiveness of the Egyptian Navy was demonstrated to the entire world very soon after the June war, when on 21 October 1967, Egyptian missile boats successfully launched a surface-to-surface missile attack against Israel's flagship, the destroyer "Eilat". Two missiles found their target, and the "Eilat" sank in Egyptian territorial waters to the north-east of Port Said with heavy loss of life.

The war of attrition which broke out towards the end of 1969 provided a useful opportunity to experiment with new tactical procedures and test enemy reactions. At the same time, no effort was spared to increase the efficiency and combat readiness of the navy, as well as to gain combat experience. On the strategic level talks were held with various Arab nations to ensure there would be access to alternative stationing points in the Red Sea, so as to enable the Egyptian Navy to fight effectively even at great distances from its home bases.

Planning for the October offensive:

Serious planning for the October operations started as from January 1972. The actual naval plan for the war, code-named "Granite", was altered a number of times to ensure that all combat missions assigned were within the combat capability of the forces that would carry them out.

For the first time, special attention was given to our ability to deceive the enemy as to our intentions. This was a very important factor in the success of the operations, as the Israeli forces only needed between 48 and 72 hours to be on a full war footing.

A fairly accurate and unbiased estimate of enemy combat capabilities was worked out and the distribution of their units was mapped. It was on this basis that the plan of action was then drawn up.

The Department of Naval Operations was quite aware of the difficulties facing the navy in the forthcoming war. Tremendous efforts were made to effectively pre-empt all those factors that might hinder the successful execution of the plan. Egypt's former naval superiority, which dated from the 1956 arms deal with the Soviet Union, had slowly been eroded. The Russian-made "STYX" surface-to-surface guided missiles which had been deployed so successfully in the attack on the Israeli destroyer "Eilat" in October 1967 were no longer as effective as they once had been. Details of their characteristics had become known to Israel and their weakness against small targets had been exposed.

The Navy thus found itself in a very awkward position with regard to its principal weapon, which was effectively useless against Israel's newly-acquired "Saar"- and "Rashef"-class missile boats. Moreover Israel had stopped using its bigger vessels, such as destroyers, in combat.

There were also major problems with regard to the coordination of the different armed forces. Modern naval combat strategies make no sense without adequate air support, yet the situation at the time dictated that most of the available air-support would be directed to the army's assault on the Suez Canal. Naval supporting fire for the army would normally be provided by destroyers, yet these cannot operate safely without sufficient air cover.

Working out possible solutions to these problems then became the main task for the Department of Naval Operations. It soon became clear that it would be essential to catch Israel unaware, if a victory was to be achieved under these difficult conditions.

First, it was decided to expand the area of combat into the strategic heartland of the Arab world, southwards into the Red Sea towards Bab-El-Mandab, and westwards into the Mediterranean towards Libya. This would put the area of combat out of reach of Israeli airplanes. Secondly, it was decided to deploy submarines and special forces using light craft over a large area, as the core of the strategy.

For the first time the Egyptian Navy decided to engage in mine-warfare. Not only would Israel be completely unprepared for this tactic, but there were no mine-sweepers in the Israeli Navy. Mines were used extensively in the Gulf of Suez area and also in the Mediterranean, where they presented the enemy with an insuperable problem. Israel's dependence on external supplies of oil provided the key to a major strategic victory for the Egyptian Navy.

As far as fire support missions for the army were concerned, several torpedo-boats were converted to operate as new rocket-launching fast-attack craft. These were very effective in combat, as they could approach undetected and deliver rapid and devastating fire strikes from seawards. These units were developed and equipped in secret by the Navy; when unleashed, they took Israel totally by surprise.

Early in the planning stage, the weakness of the Israeli Navy in the Red Sea was recognised. There were no Israeli missile boats in that area, no mine sweepers and no anti-submarine boats. At the same time, the configuration of the Gulf of Suez and the Red Sea provided an ideal stage on which to mount combat actions with the aim of disrupting the enemy lines of communication. Israel's dependence on oil from the Persian Gulf passing through the straits of Bab-El-Mandab and oil from the Gulf of Suez passing through the straits of Jubal meant that intensive pressure could be brought to bear on Israel if these sources could be turned off. Hence it was decided to exploit this situation to the maximum.

Operational deployment of forces:

The October War was an offensive operation. Sufficient time was therefore available for the navy to deploy its forces, even though some of the operational areas were at a considerable distance from the home bases.

In order to keep our operational aims secret, it was decided that forces should be deployed as invisibly as possible, taking care to disguise our intentions. As for those formations and units which would be active against maritime lines of transport, the idea was that these forces should be positioned as close as possible to their combat area, making use of stationing facilities in Arab countries such as Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

The Egyptian naval units assigned to the Bab-El-Mandab operation left port under cover of a routine trip for repairs and docking in the port of Karachi.

Naval operations: the master plan

The guiding concept behind the planned naval operations was to employ the full force of the Navy on three levels, as follows:

A) At the tactical level: to concentrate operations in support of the army offensive.

B) At the operational level: to ensure naval security in the operational zone of the naval bases by carrying out all kinds of defensive action, with the aim of preventing enemy naval penetration and repelling any such enemy action.

C) At the strategic level: to cut off enemy lines of maritime communication both in the Red Sea and in the Mediterranean.

Naval support of the army offensive:

Naval actions in support of the army offensive consisted of participating in fire preparation for the assault on the Suez Canal, mainly using coastal artillery firing east of Port Fouad on the Mediterranean side and towards Suez-Eioun Mussa on the Red Sea side. A number of rocket assaults from seawards were also carried out against coastal targets at the request of army command.

Many of these raids were concentrated during critical stages, so as to divert Israeli attention, and particularly so as to draw their air power away from the main direction of the Second and Third Field Army assaults.

Naval assistance was also provided for small tactical operations by commando forces from the Second Field Army raiding behind enemy defensive positions east of Port Said, as well as for raids across the Gulf of Suez carried out by special forces from the Red Sea military command. The Navy also executed a number of commando and frogmen attacks across the Gulf of Suez in its own right.

Securing the operational zone:

In order to secure the operational zone, the navy carried out defensive actions against submarines, mines and frogmen using forces from the various naval bases.

Israeli missile boat attacks were repelled by coastal artillery, coastal missile defence batteries and in some cases by missile boats.

In this type of combat, however, the Israeli Navy had the upper hand, thanks to its more modern boats and the effective support it received from the Israeli Air Force, especially its helicopters.

Disruption of enemy lines of communications:

This mission was given the highest priority by the Egyptian Navy which foresaw the potential strategic effect on Israel of a successful action in this area. Intelligence reports indicated that Israeli oil reserves were somewhat limited. The Egyptian Navy took Israel by surprise by acting in this way.

The usual artillery strikes along the south-eastern Mediterranean coast were no longer the order of the day; now operations were concentrated more than a thousand miles away from the Israeli bases, in the Bab-El-Mandab strait; south of Malta, and so on. For once the Israelis found themselves outwitted and unable to retaliate, and the mission was crowned with spectacular results.

First and foremost, it proved to Israel that the occupation of Sharm-El-Sheikh would not necessarily guarantee secure supplies of oil through the port of Eilat. Israel badly needed oil, yet supplies from the oil wells captured in 1967 were no longer reaching Eilat. Attempts to force a passage through the Strait of Jubal only resulted in further losses due to mines.

This success was achieved by the Navy exercising its right to stop and search ships carrying strategic supplies to Israel, and by declaring certain areas unsafe for maritime navigation due to the outbreak of hostilities. In this way, it was not necessary to declare an international blockade of the straits.

It is interesting to note that these operations continued long after the cessation of hostilities on the Suez Canal front. The navy continued to monitor traffic in the Bab-El-Mandab Strait, and to warn all ships not to proceed northwards into the area declared dangerous to navigation.

This situation was still in place in January 1974, and its effects on the negotiations that took place after the cease-fire was crucial. Lifting the "blockade" of Bab-El-Mandab was one of Israel's first requests, and proved a very useful trump card in the hands of the Egyptian negotiators.

The Navy's part in the victory:

Although the Egyptian Navy had to fight its battles with limited air support, using outdated missile boats and ineffective missiles, it still managed to achieve some spectacular successes during the October War, especially on the strategic level.

Israel was caught unaware by new and effective operational planning for combat actions that took place miles away from Israeli bases, out of reach of Israeli missile boats and aircraft. In areas nearer to home, the Egyptian Navy made full use of mine warfare, which also played on one of the Israeli Navy's weaknesses.

The strategic deployment of the Israeli Navy left the Red Sea front in particular poorly equipped to face this new type of warfare. In the Mediterranean, it proved impossible to transport much-needed strategic supplies from Western European ports, and Israel was forced to depend on a United States air bridge.

It is true that the Israeli Navy scored some minor victories in missile boat actions, but not so as to secure any significant operational or strategic advantage. Israeli frogmen managed to penetrate the defences of some forward bases and inflicted minor losses, but only at the cost of many lives. On many occasions Egyptian fishing boats and villages were shelled by Israeli boats on the pretext that they were Egyptian naval bases.

On the whole the Egyptian Navy managed to accomplish most of its missions successfully. These successes can be attributed in part to sound operational planning for the proper combat deployment of all available forces.

Yet the most important factor was the high morale of both officers and men, and their dedication in carrying out their duties with extreme diligence and valour. They were always ready to sacrifice their lives for their country, and their trust in God and the righteousness of their cause was limitless.

It was thanks to them that the glorious victory of the Sixth of October was achieved.

'Stand up, for you shall not perish'

October returns, once more. What can Egypt learn from victory? **Anouar Abdel-Malek** offers some answers



This article is no stroll down memory lane. We must understand the lessons of October. To my mind, these lessons transcend by far the military operations which entailed crossing the Bar-Lev Line and breaking down the army of a terrorist state, which allegedly had a place amongst the armies of the world.

An awareness of the cultural significance of the October War is necessary. The war was, and remains, a breaking point: the reversal of the defeat of the black days of June 1967. Weak or opportunistic people do not fully realise who was responsible for the crushing defeat. The truth is that war and peace, defeat and victory are at the core of the political leadership's responsibility. They must make the necessary preparations for all eventualities.

Sun Tsao,[1] the greatest geo-political and geo-strategic thinker in the history of humanity, lived in the fifth century BC, during the era of China's fragmentation, and was one of the most important factors in its re-unification in thinking and practice. In *The Art of War*, later Mao Zedong's main reference, he wrote: "War is an extremely important issue for the state. It is a matter involving life and death, the road to survival or destruction. Hence, it is imperative to study war with depth and care."

The defeat of June 1967 was the direct result of the revolutionary movement's misunderstanding of political leadership. Its practice was to mandate the administrative and executive powers to "trustworthy people" — army officers, pretentious thinkers, and technocrats. All these clustered around President Nasser to win his favour. At the same time, a whole generation of competent men and experts were excluded from their rightful mandates, and subsequently crushed. These were the Communists, thinkers of diverse national progressive persuasions, the young Wafdists, Misr Al-Fata, the new National Party members, and a section of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as some of the younger members of the Free Officers' movement.

Despotism replaced concerted action. Autocratic practices were pursued by each individual within his own sector, undermining the principles of national unity and joint responsibility.

This state of affairs continued until the people were confronted with the truth about our armed forces. They were unprepared for military action because the leadership had reneged on its responsibility. This led to the catastrophe. The system then collapsed, or would have, had it not been for the uprising of 9 and 10 June 1967, when Egyptians took to the streets en masse. Only this saved the state from total collapse. The people rallied round their vanquished leadership, and demanded the re-structuring of the national military forces, after they had been purged of opportunists and traitors.

In this perspective, October 1973 seems almost miraculous, and at any rate totally unexpected by the so-called politicians, thinkers and strategists of the pre-1967 era.

What occurred immediately following 10 June 1967 was an uprising of the people, especially the younger generation. They were seeking to cut out the "corruption" that festered in the political body, to shed light on the mismanagement of the country's affairs, and to introduce transparency into its administration. Fully aware of the need to respond to these demands, President Nasser made it possible for volunteers to enlist in the armed forces. More than 230,000 youths and students were accepted. They were the ones who crossed the Canal, led by young, gifted officers, on 6 October.

The construction of a new army after the collapse and defeat of June '67 meant a return to the lessons of the 1940s, particularly the message of the National Workers' and Students' Committee. It revealed the need to establish leadership on the basis of a national united front. Irrespective of their diverse and contradictory orientations, or their ideological (and, more frequently, financial) justifications, this national front would include all political forces and ideological orientations, as long as national issues represented their main concern and on the condition that they were subordinated to no foreign power.

A first attempt was made to return to the concept of a national front. This took place in 1965, after the promulgation of the National Charter and the founding of the Socialist Youth Organisation in the wake of the defeat. But the political leadership would not acknowledge that those positive though belated procedures, almost 25 years late, were only a limited undertaking, cautious to the point of negating the message of the 1940s.

In the course of this wavering, cautious return, a miracle was brought about among the ranks of the young army commanders, on whom Nasser relied: Hassan El-Badri, Abdel-Moneim Riad, Saadeddin El-Shazli, Abdel-Ghani El-Gamassi and Hassan Geredli.

This military vanguard was gathered around General Abdel-Moneim Riad, the chief of staff of the Armed Forces. He combined the most precise knowledge of military technology with a strategic vision and romantic national beliefs. He inspired thousands of young officers and commanders to mobilise and train an army of volunteers, without whose dedication the war of attrition from 1969 to 1971 would not have been the most remarkable and fiercest war waged by Egypt.

It was not an ordinary war, regardless of its inherent national and cultural particularities, and the diverse levels of technical and economic progress that had been achieved. The war was not designed just to test new weapons, as some thought at the time, but to test the enemy's defense capabilities and counter-offensive potential. In substance, it was designed to shake the enemies' confidence in their ability to use their own forces, and to spread confusion and mistrust of decision-making within the army and the political structure. In the Zionist army's general strategic view, victory was only a possibility. Confusion and disbelief set in: how could a defeated country, its army crushed, penetrate the occupied territories as the young Egyptian soldiers did? How could a weakened country, its army still in training, withstand the cruel blows at Abu Zaabal and in Upper Egypt?

The enemy still operates with the same logic today. The Zionists' inherent conviction is contempt; their blind racism is based on the belief that Israel is the only country blessed with visionary inspiration and capabilities, in addition to an eternal and inalienable right to success and victory.

The martyrdom, on 9 March 1969, of Abdel-Moneim Riad, who had exposed himself time and again to Israeli artillary from the eastern bank, signalled the rebirth of the will — the determination — to make sacrifices and achieve the crossing. Abdel-Moneim Riad was martyred: he entered the realm of the legendary and the miraculous.

Then there was the crossing itself, at 2pm on Saturday 6 October. All the strategic experts in the West, the Soviet Union and the European socialist states, firmly believed that the Bar Lev Line — a barrier of sand, built to buttress the eastern bank of the Suez Canal — could not be breached. It could not be breached by artillary, they said, nor by missiles, nor even, as some Western experts jokingly said, by a nuclear bomb. The Bar Lev Line was the symbol of the impotence forced upon us.

But then, the military commanders and engineers suddenly woke up and, in seeking a method of attack, drew on their Egyptian specificity. In trying to answer the question of how to forestall the encroachment of the desert, the young military engineers wondered how the Upper Egyptian peasant manages to preserve the the green valley, surrounded as it is by the desert. The missions that were sent off to find the answer to this apparently unrelated question soon discovered that Egyptian peasants fight off the desert by pumping water into it. Water alone holds back the desert sands. The engineers met once again with the military commanders; the outcome of this strategic meeting was an inspired and creative new idea: a water artillary force, as it were. The force of the water gushing from powerful hoses was as potent as any traditional artillary.

On 6 October, in under seven hours, this simple yet brilliant weapon succeeded in reducing the Bar Lev Line to no more than grains of sand. Crying "*Allahu Akbar*", units from the Second and Third Armies landed on the eastern bank and penetrated into the interior. No one in Egypt, not even the army, could imagine that the crossing would be that easy and quick, nor that it would take such few casualties. Egyptians had thus far been unaware that they were in a position to take the initiative, thanks to their own independent, creative initiative.

The patriotic fervour which spread through the Arab nation meant that those countries that had taken no part in the war were impelled to move. Hence the (naturally tardy) Arab summit of 18 October, at which it was agreed that oil would no longer be a commodity, but a weapon. Hitherto, oil had been sold for three dollars per barrel, the price dictated by the imperialist West and enforced by the Israeli arsenal. Overnight, its price soared to 18 dollars, then to 23. Suddenly the infrastructure of the developed Western countries seemed to crumble. The huge profits made by the industrial countries were exposed for what they were: the result of plundering the resources of the countries of the South.

Among other things, the October War demonstrated that ascendancy is only the result of a given historical conjuncture. It became clear that the East could catch up with the circle of ascendant countries, but only if it was willing to forcefully impose a policy of independence, and as long as it was prepared to pay the price. Such were the ideas of Bandung and the message of the October War.

And so the East won the day — this at a time when Vietnam was dealing a decisive blow to the American army. It was as if Vietnam and October marked the completion of a phase of world change that had begun with the liberation of China and the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. It was as if a new phase was starting, one that would lead to the formulation of a new world. But how could that be?

The reactions in various industrial countries were divergent. In the US, the reaction was a two-fold combative, strategic one. The US strengthened its strategic military alliance with the Zionist state, "the second Jewish State", as the American ambassador Sam Lewis has called it, by providing more and more technological and military support to Israel to reaffirm its superiority over all Arab countries. This was achieved through the two Gulf wars, which caused widespread destruction and smashed Arab and Islamic unity. As for the major industrial countries of Western Europe, they followed suit. A number of these countries participated in the second Gulf War to protect their interests there, thus reconfirming the Arab belief that the West, in its entirety, stands by Israel.

What is to be done, now? We must first determine the interests and plans of both major players and nascent regional coalitions, and review our accounts accordingly. And what is to be done on the domestic front? How to achieve national mobilisation? Is there a means to revive, on a different level, the United National Front? What can we do to reaffirm and deepen the ties between intellectuals and military men in Egypt?

As we set our objectives on this exceptional day, it is our duty as a people, a state and a nation to pay homage the freedom-fighters and martyrs of our national movement, of our liberation revolution, of the Egyptian and Arab armies. In doing so, we could take our cue from the Shadi Abdel-Salam film *Guyush Al-Shams* ("Armies of the Sun") which he immortalised in lines drawn from Ancient Egyptian civilisation:

"Stand up, for you shall not perish
You have been called by your name,
You have been resurrected."

Al-Ahram Weekly
With friends like these

In tactics reminiscent of the Reagan era, the Israeli prime minister has decided the world is his playground. Earlier this week, Mossad carried out a cloak and dagger operation against Khaled Misha'al, injecting him with poison. The operation was ordered by Netanyahu himself and was carried out in Jordan, a country with which Israel signed a peace treaty in 1994, and which Israel considers its closest Arab friend.

Netanyahu, during a press conference on Monday, showed no signs of remorse, saying that any damage done in relations with Jordan can be mended. There was no apology proffered to either Jordan, or Canada — a country whose passports were forged and used by the two Mossad agents. The important thing said Netanyahu, is that terrorists will be pursued by Israel, no matter where they hide.

But the tragedy of this situation is not just that Israel continues to use the same despicable and terroristic tactics it blames on Hamas but that Netanyahu believes his cause so holy that he is willing to ignore even this peace agreement, as well as the Oslo Accords.

What next? Will the Camp David Accords also be summarily ignored should some character, deemed unsavory by Netanyahu, venture to Cairo?

The real crisis in this peace process is not one of security or land, but Netanyahu's flagrant disregard for the principles which this process is supposed to embody. He has already said in no uncertain terms, on several occasions, that his government is not obliged to follow through on previous agreements. But is his government also not obliged to comply with international law.

The Israeli premier has taken on Hamas and Hizbullah in some sort of short-sighted, maverick attempt to secure what he feels should be Israel's sacred rights. But, after an operation such as this, do Israelis really want a leader who so flagrantly undermines the sense of morality they pride themselves on?

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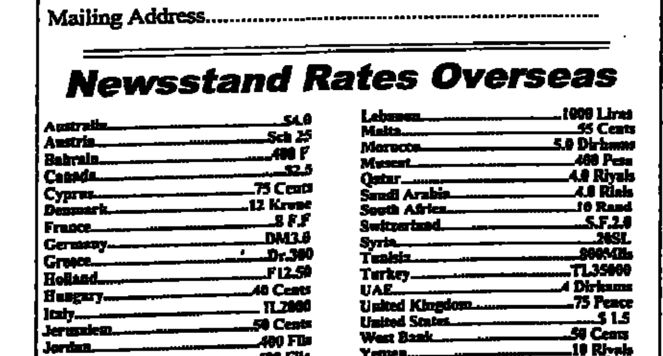
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An ideological bulldozer



Ibrahim Nafie wonders whether the US can prise Netanyahu away from his profound antagonism to peace

Most commentators agree that US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's current drive to salvage the peace process is doomed unless it redresses the deterioration in the climate for compromise evinced since Netanyahu's election.

Netanyahu has consistently undermined everything accomplished during the long and arduous negotiations between the Arabs and Israel's Labour government. In his attempt to impose his own agenda he has consistently demonstrated his animosity toward peace, allowing his behaviour to be determined by ideological obsession rather than sound politics.

Netanyahu belongs to the radical Zionist splinter group founded in the 1920s by Russian born Vladamir Jabotinsky, the godfather of former Prime Minister Menachim Begin whose followers rejected any possible form of coexistence with the Palestinians. In Jabotinsky's words, the Palestinians must be fought, defeated and driven from Palestine.

Although some Likud leaders accommodated themselves to the concept of peace following President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977, and even began to sense the need to reconcile themselves to the changes in the region following the beginnings of the peace process in Madrid in 1991, Netanyahu has clung tenaciously to his petrified, out-moded beliefs. Following his election in June 1996 he engineered a coalition between the Likud and other extremist religious parties, fellow ideological travellers who believe that Israeli control over Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian territories is an article of faith that cannot be subject to political considerations. Simply stated, they oppose peace because peace means restoring land to the Palestinians.

The peace process was always intended to transform the antagonism towards peace that had for long prevailed in the region into an antagonism towards war. Yet since reaching power, Netanyahu has undermined this spirit with all the subtlety of a bulldozer. The essential aim of the Oslo agreements was to effect a process of give and take: the Palestinians would end their hostility to Israel and accept coexistence in exchange for Israel's recognition of the need to end its occupation of Palestinian land and of the Palestinians' right to an independent, sovereign state. Netanyahu, who seeks a Palestinian entity located firmly beneath the Israeli boot, opposes this process. Not surprisingly, his contempt for the principles that made the peace process viable has revived the very tensions that the peace process attempted to alleviate.

The US administration has oft declared its hostility to the enemies of peace, and has been keen to place Hamas extremists within this category. Yet if US policy makers were to engage in a little hard thinking they would have to bracket the extremist Likud Party alongside Hamas suicide bombers. As an American Jewish writer has recently argued, the suicide bombs which brought Netanyahu to power are an exemplary proof of the fact that extremists on both sides are working to achieve the same aims. Neither side wants the Israelis and the Palestinians to reach a settlement.

Recent American disregard of the region immediately prior to Albright's sudden flurry of interest has helped Netanyahu to capitalise on the unwritten alliance against peace. According to American political analysts, suicide bombers now count among the key players in Arab-Israeli negotiations. Every time another one of their bombs goes off, Netanyahu launches an offensive against his actual partner in the peace process, Yasser Arafat, and uses the bombing as a pretext to renege further on the Oslo Accords.

Once one understands the foundations of Netanyahu's policies, the gap between his statements on peace and his actions appears more glaring than ever. Perhaps it was Washington's realisation of these contradictions that prompted the renewed diplomatic effort following a six month hiatus, as the Americans sought to reaffirm their commitment to the fundamental principles of the peace process. Albright's declarations clearly run counter to Netanyahu's ideological obsessions and political objectives yet, as might be expected, Israel's prime minister appears as determined as ever to get what he wants, even if that means jeopardising the entire peace process and bringing the region to the brink of war.

Frustrated state department officials question whether the US should continue with its current course of diplomacy when one side of the peace process is so dangerously obstructive. Only the US can answer that question. They have the influence and the means, if they are willing to use them, to safeguard the peace process against deliberate acts of sabotage.

Karl Marx and Akhenaton

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses the implications behind the increasingly religious slant of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the consequences this could have for Arab Christians

I have often asked myself why the Arab-Israeli conflict should retain so much of its intractability while this no longer applies to the once equally intractable conflict between what was once known as the Soviet Union on the one hand and the United States on the other. Of course, it is to be questioned whether the two conflicts are comparable in the first place, not only because one of the protagonists in one of the conflicts has simply disappeared — at least under its former name — but also because of their different natures. For while the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union dominated most of the second half of the 20th century, and produced what has come to be described as the 'bipolar world order' between communism and capitalism, the Arab-Israeli conflict is attributed to a nationalistic dispute between pan-Arabism and Zionism.

However, the two conflicts have certain traits in common, if not on substance, then at least in their structural dynamics. Both proceed from the assumption that the protagonists are mutually exclusive. Accommodation through "peaceful coexistence" at the global level, or through the "peace process" in the Middle East, was perceived by the conflicting parties as a tactical rather than a strategic move: it was, ultimately, either capitalism or communism at the global level, pan-Arabism or Zionism at the regional.

And given that they have traits in common, it follows that the small is a sub-set of the large, that is, that the global should take precedence over the regional, so that if the conflict that once held between the two superpowers can be resolved, the same should apply to a conflict that is regional. However, this assumption is disproved by the facts, which seem to indicate that there is no solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict in any foreseeable future.

If these conflicts are placed within a hierarchial framework, one cannot reduce the hierarchy to the space (i.e. geographical) dimension only, but should take into consideration the time (i.e. historical) dimension as well. Actually, the global conflict between capitalism and communism reflected the age-old question of how best society's material interests could be managed. Communism was the solution proposed to this problem by Karl Marx in the 19th century, and a specific version of it was implemented in the 20th. The conflict in the Middle East revolves around even more ancient questions touching on spiritual values and identity problems related to the three monotheistic religions. Today universally credited with being the first monotheist in history is the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaton. The focal point at which the three monotheistic religions intersect is Jerusalem, a holy city for all three. The spiritual values related to the Middle East conflict could perhaps explain why it cannot be seen as merely a sub-set of the global conflict which has marked much of the 20th century.

What is worth noting here is that if the conflict between capitalism and communism was basically bipolar (class struggle being played out essentially between two basically antagonistic classes), when it comes to frictions between the major monotheistic religions, conflict is tripolar. But this tripolarity has never been played out along an equilateral triangle, so to speak. At the end of the Middle Ages, and in the centuries preceding the transfer of the epicentre of civilisation worldwide from the Islamic to the Christian world, the Crusades epitomised the confrontation between Islam and Christianity as the two main protagonists, while Judaism was the third party, more or less marginalised by the other two religions. At the end of this century, the two main protagonists in the Middle East are Islam and Judaism, and a question worth raising is where exactly Christianity stands in the new rationale.

There are signs that this question is not only of academic interest but can prove to be of crucial importance on a more practical level over the coming period. One such sign is the draft bill, now before the sub-committee for international relations of the American House of Representatives, which calls for penalising states that violate the religious rights of minorities, with special concern for Christian minorities throughout the world. The draft bill is strongly supported by the powerful Christian Coalition allied to the opposition Republican Party, now the majority party in Congress, and is opposed by the Clinton administration, the Democratic Party, the National Council of Churches of Christ, the Council for American-Islamic Relations, and a number of prominent American press commentators.

While the row over the draft bill can be attributed to domestic factors inside the United States, the repercussions of its enactment are bound to spill over into other parts of the world, not least the Middle East with its eponymous conflict. Initially perceived as a largely secular conflict between two nationalisms, the confrontation between pan-Arabism and Zionism has gradually come to acquire an increasingly religious slant. The late President Sadat, who, to justify his peace treaty with Israel and his alliance with the United States against the Soviet Union, coined the slogan, "union of the three monotheistic religions against atheism", had much to do with this mutation in the character of the conflict. With Arab Christians unable to identify with either Jewish Zionism or with the revival of Islamic fundamentalism, it is worth asking where they sand today.

"The Arab Christian in the contemporary world" was the subject of a seminar held in Jordan two weeks ago under the auspices of Crown Prince Hassan. Israel has everything to gain from exacerbating inter-Arab tensions, particularly between Arab Christians and Muslims, taking advantage of the fact that the identity of an Arab Christian is derived from two distinct sources: a historical/cultural source that links him to the Arab Muslim and a religious source that relates him to Christians elsewhere, including in the West. The draft bill now under discussion in the US Congress aims at promoting the second aspect of an Arab Christian's identity at the expense of the first. Both Arab Muslims and Arab Christians have every interest in working together to overcome whatever difficulties stand in the way of consolidating the first aspect of the Arab Christian's identity. This cannot be implemented by a decision from 'above', but must be worked out at the grass-roots level in both communities.

Although Western civilisation is often described as Judeo-Christian, it would be wrong to assume that frictions between Jews and Christians in the West have disappeared altogether. One recent example has been the Pope's reluctance to endorse the French Catholic clergy's public apology to French Jews for the church's silence concerning their persecution under the Vichy government. However, one point on which Western Christians and Jews totally agree, albeit for different motives, is the need to ensure Israel's continued existence.

Arab Christians who have emigrated to the West stand at the heart of all these dilemmas. If Arab Muslims fail to dissipate frictions with their Christian fellow-countrymen, Arab *émigré* Christians risk falling prey to Western anti-Arab propaganda. This would be very much encouraged by extremists in the American Jewish lobby. On the other hand, if Arab Muslims and Christians succeed in overcoming frictions between them, the latter are the best Arab ambassadors to uphold the Arab cause in the West. One must not forget that many Arab Christians were architects of the ideology of pan-Arabism, which still constitutes the best cultural framework for Arab unity, whatever the religious differences.

Autumn reflections

By Naguib Mahfouz

The month of October is very precious to us. It was during October that it became clear that the Arabs must not only show the world but also prove to themselves what they are capable of. Many of us had reached the point of total despair, but October arrived with its glory to give us hope once more.

I have been asked why the October victory has not been properly celebrated in book or film. Events of such magnitude take time to be absorbed by men of letters.

We became involved in very critical controversial issues which separated us from this great event. For example, the open door policy had a very negative effect on public opinion. This was followed by the peace policy which at first caused considerable apprehension ... and concern. Now, after nearly a quarter of a century, I am convinced that the time has come when we must not think of October in a political sense, but as an event in itself.

The next observation I have to make is that October was presented to public opinion as an end to all our difficulties, as if from then on all would be affluence and happiness. This was obviously not the case; October was a beginning, not an end.

October was the beginning of the long road to reform along which we are travelling. October was Sadat's greatest achievement, followed by the peace treaty with Israel and then by democracy.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week
War and peace

Akhbar El-Yom: "All the Arabs stood behind the late Egyptian President Anwar El-Sadat when he achieved the great victory of October 1973. But most of them opposed him when he raised the banner of peace. The Arabs at the time dreamt of nothing but of razing Israel to the ground or throwing its people in the sea. El-Sadat was ahead of his time when he pursued his vision of peace and Egypt suffered more from the peace treaty than it did from recurrent wars. The Arabs cut diplomatic relations with Egypt, heaped scorn upon it and boycotted it, but Egypt did not waver and succeeded in recovering every inch of its occupied land at the negotiating table. The Arabs have now opted for peace as a way of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, having realised that wars brought them nothing but disasters."
(Ibrahim Saada, 4 October)

October: "We learnt from the October War that achieving a victory is impossible without sacrifices. A victory needs sound planning. It needs capable, well-trained and determined men and a general feeling among the public that the battle concerns us all. The 1973 war was crucial not just to Egypt but to all the Arabs. We are in debt to the men who fought that war. The concept of Arab unity has the power of nuclear energy. The Arabs united are a million times stronger than they are divided. In the gloom that envelops the region because of the actions of the Israeli government, the the Arabs should close their ranks."
(Ragab El-Banna, 5 October)

Al-Ahram: "Anwar El-Sadat is the hero of the 1973 war and the peace that followed. But some of our television serials portray him as a patron of corruption and decadence. It is clear that we have not yet agreed on the achievements of the late president. Perhaps we should should put him on trial, preferably in the square that bears his name. Perhaps we should change the square's name, to Sins Square for example. This would make us the first nation to blame a leader for achieving an honourable peace."
(Anis Mansour, 5 October)

Al-Wafd: "The forthcoming talks between the Palestinian Authority and Israel will not solve the outstanding issues. Those issues will most likely be postponed to later stages of the talks. Israel will have succeeded in resuming the talks without suspending the construction of settlements. US pressure is mere lip service and Israel continues to pursue whatever policies it sees fit."
(Sanaa El-Said, 5 October)

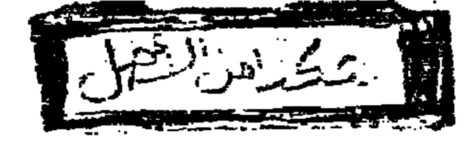
Rose El-Youssef: "The guns have fallen silent, victory has been achieved, a peace treaty has been signed, but the war is not over. Diplomatic relations have been established, ambassadors have been exchanged, joint projects have been launched, but the war is not over. What we have now is a different sort of war, a cold war in which battles are not fought out in the desert with lethal weapons but in the quiet of boardrooms, on the pages of the media and in the minds of men and women. The conspiracy is ever present and spies try to infiltrate Egypt at every moment. It is no coincidence that on the 24th anniversary of the October victory Israel was pressing for the return of its spy Azzam Azzam. It is no coincidence that President Mubarak mentioned that no less than 31 spies and criminals were sent back to Israel in the past few years. And it is no coincidence that we hear of one more insult of the Egyptian ambassador to Israel. We must not forget that the war is not over."
(Editorial, 6 October)

Al-Gomhuria: "A just and comprehensive peace has not yet been fully achieved in the region, but the October victory proves that the Egyptian armed forces have changed Israel's perception of peace. This is why the army must remain a capable and deterrent force. Real security does not depend on geographical expansion, but on coexistence, trust and justice for all."
(Editorial, 6 October)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



A steel-clad hero, his smile that of victory itself, as if a smile, like a banner, could lift up his head and place a crown upon it. A handful of Egypt's dust, blown across the Bar Lev Line and scattered through Sinai as the soldiers broke through the "invincible barrier"... Every year, October's soldiers are celebrated in every home in the country. But the lines I have drawn cannot capture the heroism of those who erased the defeat of 1967, and secured victory in 1973.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

The China way

The Chinese economy has taken off in the past twenty years and, according to World Bank estimates, its GNP will increase sevenfold in the coming two decades.

These figures alone are sufficient to justify Western interest in whatever is taking place, important or trivial, in China — Western fascination, one might say, with anything China does. The West's interest is due not only to the fact that an Asian giant has awoken and begun to impose its presence on the international scene as a major power with almost unlimited human, economic and military assets, but also to the discovery the Chinese path of development proves conclusively that Western capitalism is not "the final stage", or the end of history.

The Asian pattern, in all its diversity, represents a cultural challenge that threatens the West's monopoly of its own backyard and announces a new era in the long history of humanity.

The world last week focused on the 15th congress of the Chinese Communist Party, the first after the death of the Chinese leader Deng Xiao Peng, who changed modern China after the death of Chairman Mao. The international community was seeking indications of the huge developments that will shortly affect the world politically, militarily and technologically. The main concern was whether Chinese President Jiang Zemin, Deng's successor, will succeed in steering the same course, and whether he possesses the leadership qualities necessary to enable him to take Chinese socialism into a new era and a new world.

Most articles and commentaries published about China adopt a Western perspective; American standards are most often the criteria according to which international opinion views China. Our judgement and opinions are coloured by the cultural differences between the West and China. We must understand, on their own terms, the problems awaiting China, the challenges it must face and the failures which await it, whilst bearing the burden of over a billion people who eat, drink, and learn and look forward to a measure of freedom and participation in political life.

One cannot, however, employ Western values and standards in judging China. Clearly, the new Chinese leadership under Jiang Zemin has succeeded in negotiating the transition following the death of Deng Xiao Peng. The new China is eager to achieve its targets, employing a pioneering model which springs directly from its soil, rich in tradition and values, in order to revive the splendours of its past.



Soapbox

October lessons

The role of the armed forces is far more difficult in times of peace than during war. The possibility of resorting to war can never be discarded. To refer to a war as being "the last" is a figure of speech, which is only appropriate to a specific political stance, under certain historical conditions.

There is a clear relation between the economy and amassing power. The issues of national security and the strategic balance of power are, at the core, both economic and political. The armed forces' performance during the October War, for instance, reflected on the various civilian production sectors in the state. The war also underlined the importance of political decision-making as the principal starting point in strategic planning and other fields.

An Israeli official recently claimed that, if Israel were to attack Syria, Syria would be defenceless. This is patently false. History has proved the importance of Syrian-Egyptian cooperation within the framework of Arab relations generally, and a limited Saudi Arabian role specifically. History has also proved that right without might is nothing. The main lesson here is that, no matter how realistic we may choose to be, we must not abandon our principles and the goals we have set ourselves. The struggle, in its diverse forms, will continue for a long time. The peace process is only a phase in that struggle.

The October War taught us lessons for today. We must continue to develop them for tomorrow.

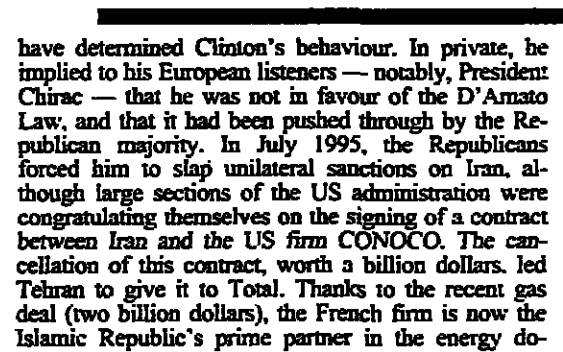


This week's Soapbox speaker is an expert in military and strategic affairs at the Cairo-based Centre for Middle East Studies.

Ahmed Abdel-Halim

Flexibility in the face of failure

Is Israel behind the US's reluctance to initiate a dialogue with Iran? **Eric Rouleau** comments on the Total deal and wonders how far America is willing to go



An unprecedented turn of events: the United States has backed down before France on a confrontation of crucial importance. Washington's abstention — temporary, it is true — from slapping sanctions on the oil company Total, which has concluded a natural gas deal with Iran, is an implicit admission of impotence.

The event is remarkable for several reasons: President Clinton runs the risk of a clash with a Republican-majority Congress; last year, this same Congress passed the so-called D'Amato Law, which attempts to deprive all non-American firms of the right to invest more than $40 million in the Libyan or Iranian energy industries. Even more serious is the precedent this retreat sets, which will certainly encourage other international conglomerates to snub the US prohibition; both the Dutch-British consortium Shell, and the French firm Elf-Aquitaine, for instance, could soon sign natural gas contracts which they had hitherto been hesitant to conclude with Tehran, for fear of being subjected to sanctions. Total's victory, furthermore, is likely to win the approval of the Caspian Sea countries, which had planned to send their gas and petrol through the Islamic Republic. Total, therefore, could vie confidently with its American and Russian competitors in this petrol-rich region.

In a bid to save face, and also, no doubt, time, President Clinton has given himself six months to think before deciding whether or not to "punish" the French company. This delay, it is said in Washington, will serve to apply pressure to France and the European Union and persuade them to join their efforts to those of the US in the anti-terrorist struggle. A high-ranking State Department official complained several days ago, during a conversation with this writer, of Europe's "ill will". According to him, the Europeans have already rejected several collaboration proposals, and have gone so far as to refuse to draw up a list of points for which to blame the Islamic Republic. Evidently, the Europeans have no intention of adopting the enemies, not to mention the methods, of their Transatlantic allies. Everything suggests that they are not planning to accept tomorrow what they refused to vigorously yesterday.

The Americans' exercise in backpedalling is exceptional, but understandable when one knows the factors which prompted President Clinton to take a decision so loaded with consequences.

Clearly, he could hardly have inflicted significant damage upon the French company, which had taken the precaution of liquidating virtually all its assets in the US, but he could have taken a symbolic measure. The real reasons for his passivity lie elsewhere: the United States cannot allow themselves the luxury of launching a trade and economic war with Europe, which is unanimously determined not only to exact reprisals from US firms, but also to file a complaint with the International Trade Organisation, accusing the US of having violated the principle of free trade. According to experts on the question, Washington would have been condemned by the international organisation. Nor is President Clinton keen on triggering a conflict with Russia, the ally of the European Community, given that one of its largest enterprises, Gazprom, is associated with Total in Iran.

Other motives, most of which he cannot confess to, have determined Clinton's behaviour. In private, he implied to his European listeners — notably, President Chirac — that he was not in favour of the D'Amato Law, and that it had been pushed through by the Republican majority. In July 1995, the Republicans forced him to slap unilateral sanctions on Iran, although large sections of the US administration were congratulating themselves on the signing of a contract between Iran and the US firm CONOCO. The cancellation of this contract, worth a billion dollars, led Tehran to give it to Total. Thanks to the recent gas deal (two billion dollars), the French firm is now the Islamic Republic's prime partner in the energy domain.

More generally, the policy of unilateral sanctions that Washington practices globally is the cause of increasing concern in American business circles, which find themselves excluded from large markets to the benefit of non-American industrialists and exporters. These punitive measures have brought the US scarce political profit. The experience, furthermore, has amply demonstrated that the economic sanctions, whether uni- or multilateral, imposed since the second world war have almost never achieved their political aims. Yet not only has the US Congress failed to learn the relevant lessons; it also continues to impose an ever-widening range of punitive measures upon those countries found guilty of not sharing the US's options. The public at large is generally unaware of the fact that, in the past four years, Congress has passed 61 unilateral sanctions against 35 countries.

Naturally, resistance to these practices is on the increase, as is the pressure being applied to the Clinton administration. A lobby — USA Engage — has thus been formed grouping 600 industrial and commercial enterprises, with the objective of opposing the policy of sanctions. Meanwhile, increasingly numerous voices are being raised in politics and the media, encouraging Washington to normalise relations with the Islamic Republic. One of the most significant manifestations of this opposition was the publication last May in Foreign Affairs of an article signed by three front-line figures: Zbigniew Brzezinski, Brent Scowcroft and Richard Murphy. The two former were presidential advisers at the White House; the third, assistant secretary of state. The authors of this text emphasised the fact that Washington's hostility toward Iran has pushed the latter closer to Russia, while further widening the chasm between the US, on one hand, and the European nations and some Gulf countries, on the other.

Having accused Congressional Republicans (explicitly) and the Israeli lobby (implicitly), of being behind the sanctions, they argue that these are meaningless: if one is to believe them, Iran is not a military threat to its neighbours, and lacks the means to finance subversive activity beyond its borders. They suggest, finally, that Washington resort to the methods of classical diplomacy, as the Europeans have done, to dissuade Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Several renowned journalists, some of whom have been received in Tehran with respect, and sometimes cordial hospitality, have also become advocates of normalisation.

The debate, in fact, has even divided the Clinton administration itself, as a high-ranking State Department official told me the other day: "Our policy in Iran has failed." He added, it is true: "because of you Europeans".

The failure is undeniable. The sanctions, of course, have caused difficulties, notably of a financial nature, in the Iranian economy, but it has managed to develop thanks to the participation of industrial powers in Europe and Asia. The D'Amato Law has failed to prevent the petrol industry from taking off once more. No one in Washington denies that the Islamic Republic is firmly rooted and, since the election of Mohamed Khatami, that it is headed for a reinforcement of its legitimacy and its institutions.

The Americans have suddenly discovered, thanks to the most recent elections, that a certain kind of democracy exists in Iran. Zbigniew Brzezinski, among many others, has noted: "We did not realise that the Iranians had such a margin of freedom, even if, in our eyes, this remains clearly insufficient."

Although prudence is still the rule, Mohamed Khatami's personality continues to fascinate, while raising hopes that the Iranian regime can evolve sufficiently to obtain an honourable place for the Islamic Republic on the international scene. The statements made by the new president with respect to various freedoms, human rights, international détente, and cooperation with the Gulf countries have captured the attention of the most suspicious US officials. They have been especially impressed by the make-up of the new government, and the appointment of moderates to the head of intelligence and the Pasdarans, replacing men considered favourable to terrorism, and (hitherto) immovable.

Is US policy toward Iran being revised, as the US media have claimed since Khatami was elected? To this question, officials at the State Department and the White House respond with a resounding no. If one is to believe them, these "rumours" are the fruit of journalists' imagination. If one mentions the decision taken by Washington last July to stop opposing the construction of a pipeline from Turkmenistan to Turkey via Iran, US officials insist that the measure was taken to serve the interests of friendly or allied countries, Turkey or those of the Caspian Sea. But they forget to mention Israel. One of the main beneficiaries of this project, in fact, is the powerful Israeli group Merhav, firmly settled in Turkmenistan, which wishes to participate in the construction of the pipeline. When US and Israeli interests coincide, there is little risk in tossing Iran a bouquet.

It remains, nevertheless, that Washington has adopted a more flexible position over a dialogue with Iran. Not long ago, US officials were speaking of "conditions" for opening negotiations. The Iranian government had to accept, among other things, being called to account over its subversive and terrorist operations abroad, its attitude toward peace with Israel, and its attempts to acquire weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear armaments.

Strangely, an Iranian official was telling me, the Americans — unlike the Europeans — never bring up human rights or the *fatwa* concerning Salman Rushdie. Since then, this position has grown more flexible. Dialogue, it is said today in Washington, can take place "without preconditions", each of the parties being free to include upon the agenda the issues they choose.

"We are perfectly ready," states an American official, "to discuss subjects in which Iran is interested — for instance, the future of the regime in Iraq, the return of civil peace in Afghanistan, Gulf security." As for Washington, it could include questions of terrorism and the nuclear industry, not the Arab-Israeli peace process, correctly judged too premature an initiative.

One may well ask, therefore: what obstacle prevents the dialogue from getting underway? The US administration invariably replies: "Iran must express its desire for a dialogue publicly, and, especially, it must make clear and unambiguous its intention to turn to a new page in our relations." In fact, Washington is waiting for a sufficiently significant gesture to convince public opinion and Congress that negotiations with Iran are neither shameful nor a step towards capitulation. This possibility, however, seems to be out of the question for a long time to come, taking the White House's weakness into account. It is currently the target of numerous destabilisation campaigns, led or dreamed up by the Republicans, and the power of the pro-Israeli lobby, which enjoys considerable influence in Congress.

Mr Netanyahu and his friends in the media have redoubled their efforts in recent weeks, attempting to convince public opinion that Russian-Iranian cooperation has reached a dangerous pass. They would have us believe that, two years from now at most, Tehran will own missiles capable of launching biological, chemical and nuclear weapons, while "hundreds of Russian scientists and technicians are in Bushehr to contribute to the construction of a reactor, supposedly destined for peaceful use." This, however, is just so much "information", and leaves the Europeans cold.

What is the real aim of this demonisation campaign? To prevent US-Iranian rapprochement? Or to offer Bill Clinton a deal, whereby Israel will recognise his freedom to implement the policy of his choice in Iran, in return for giving Netanyahu a free rein in the Occupied Territories? The question, astonishing as it may seem, is not absent from the speculations in which many observers are engaging.

Translated from French by **Pascale Ghazaleh**

The changing face of militancy

The unilateral promises to abandon violence made by armed groups in Egypt and Algeria could change the map of contemporary Islamist militancy. **Diaa Rashwan** draws parallels between the two cases

Barely three months after Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya announced its decision to cease violent activities in Egypt, Algeria went through a similar phase. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) promised to stop all attacks. Despite the differences in motivation and circumstances, there are common elements in the two moves, both of which will have a bearing on the future of the Islamist movement in both countries, and possibly throughout the Arab world.

The differences between the motives and circumstances surrounding the two decisions reflect the dissimilarities between the two countries and the two militant movements. The common factors reveal similarities among large sections of the Islamist movement, inside and outside the Arab world.

The first difference involves motives. In the case of Egypt, it is clear that the strict security measures undertaken by the state have been instrumental in Al-Gama'a's change of heart. But a deeper motive is related to Al-Gama'a's apparent decision to focus on fighting the external enemy, Israel, instead of the Egyptian regime.

A second point of difference is that, in Egypt, the decision to end the violence reflected a qualitative change, still less than entirely clear, in the nature of the militant groups in the country. These groups are being transformed from Islamist militant organisations engaged in a war with a state they perceive as infidel, to political groups with an Islamist ideology, which may disagree strongly with the state and the rest of society but refrain from branding them as infidel.

FIS motives, on the other hand, are related to the state of random violence that has plagued Algeria over the past few months, claiming 10,000 lives. The scale of the violence and the devastation it has inflicted on Algerian public life is such that the FIS wished to disassociate itself from it.

This brings us to an important point. The FIS is a political group with an Islamist ideology that has conducted its relations with the other parties to the Algerian crisis more on a political and social basis than on religious grounds. The decision to stop the violence in Algeria did not, therefore, signal a drastic change in the FIS's position, but rather the confirmation of an established attitude.

A third point of difference concerns the way the two decisions were reached. In Egypt's case, no prior negotiations were held between the state and the militants. The Egyptian state has, with one exception, consistently rejected any negotiations with the militants. The only case of negotiations took place in 1993, when former Interior Minister Mohamed Abdel-Halim Moussa conducted negotiations with the militant groups via a mediation committee. The negotiations proved unsuccessful and eventually cost Moussa his job.

In Algeria, it would seem that the FIS's decision was preceded by negotiations between the militants and senior government and army officials. Several reports spoke of active mediation by France, the United States and a Gulf state in the negotiations. Since the crisis in Algeria erupted in 1992, several rounds of secret and open negotiations have taken place between the state and the militants inside and outside the country.

The fourth point of difference relates to the position of the militant leadership. In Egypt, Al-Gama'a's spiritual leader Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, currently serving a life sentence in the US, was quick to announce his complete support of the decision to halt the violence. In Algeria, FIS leader Abassi Madani has so far declined to make his position clear. The difference may be only superficial, especially given the fact that one of the conditions of Madani's recent release was that he should refrain from making political comments.

Fifth, the FIS decision was taken in two stages. It was first announced by the Islamic Salvation Army, the military arm of the FIS, and later confirmed by the FIS Executive Committee. In Al-Gama'a's case, the decision was announced by the group's unified leadership, pointing to a difference in the structural organisation of the Egyptian and Algerian militant organisations.

There are, however, similarities between the two decisions. In both cases, they were unconditional. Both the FIS and Al-Gama'a refrained from linking their decisions to any particular demands, reflecting an apparent desire in both cases not to complicate the process of ending the violence. It is, however, possible that the negotiations preceding the decision in Algeria involved some conditions that were not made public. In Egypt, the absence of conditions indicates Al-Gama'a's realisation of the state's refusal to negotiate, but could also signal Al-Gama'a's transformation from a religious to a political group.

The second similarity is that the decisions were made unilaterally. In Egypt's case, no negotiations were conducted, and therefore Al-Gama'a had nothing to say about the state's position regarding this development. In Algeria's case, the unilateral character of the announcement minimised the government's need to explain its position vis-à-vis the FIS or its role in negotiating the deal, and thus spared it any possible embarrassment. In both cases, the FIS and Al-Gama'a elected to take the full responsibility for their decision and made no public demands on the state or other parties.

Third, both the FIS and Al-Gama'a actually share some common ground with the regime. In Algeria, the FIS and the government agree on the need to end the senseless killing. The random massacres, which threaten to rend the very fabric of Algerian society, harm the interests of both the state and the FIS. There has been at least one incident in which the FIS is said to have joined forces with government troops in fighting ultra-radical militants. In Egypt's case, Al-Gama'a seems to have come to identify with the Egyptian government's repeated confrontations with Israel since Binyamin Netanyahu came to power.

The fourth and last similarity is that, in both Egypt and Algeria, certain groups expressed opposition to the decision. Secular groups in both countries dismissed the significance of the decision. Ultra-radical groups, such as Egypt's Al-Jihad, whose leaders live abroad, and Algeria's Armed Islamic Group, were also dissatisfied with the conciliatory implications of the decisions. The radicals' opposition is easy to understand: the state is "infidel" and the fight against it must go on. More moderate groups, however, such as Algeria's Movement for a Peaceful Society and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, were remarkably reluctant to welcome the decisions, perhaps because they fear that their political role will be diminished by the restoration of normality.

The writer is managing editor of the annual The State of Religion in Egypt Report, *issued by Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.*

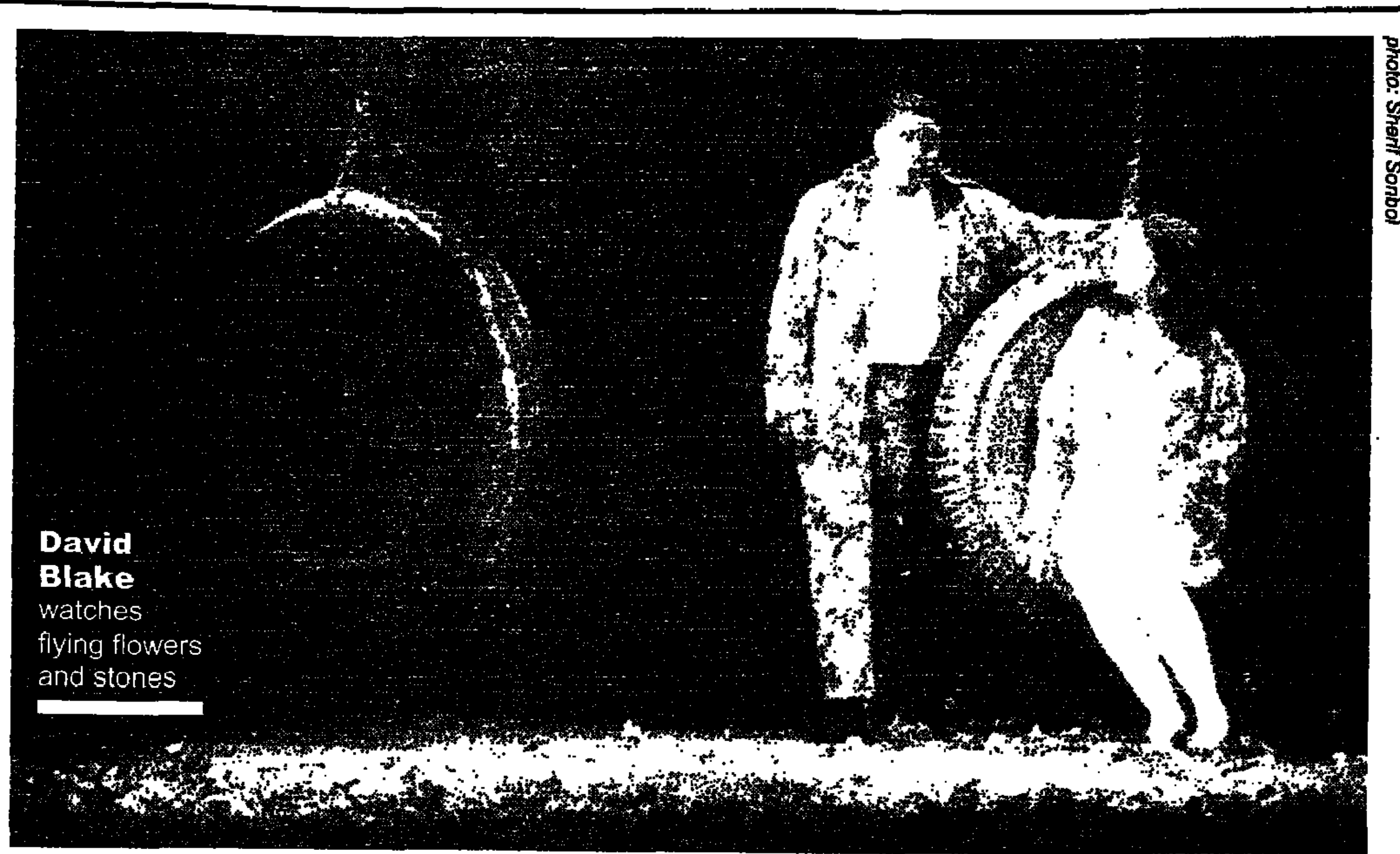


photo: Sherif Sonbol

Nevin Allouba and Mohamed Abul-Kheir

Flexible furniture

Gaetano Donizetti: Don Pasquale: Akhenaten Chamber Opera. Akhenaten Chamber Orchestra in association with the Performing and Visual Arts Department at the American University in Cairo and the Osiris Singers; Larry Catlin, choirmaster; Walid Aouni, director; Sherif Mohieddin, conductor; Ewart Hull. 30 September

After a period of neglect, the ottocento operas came back into favour through Callas and Caballè. Ironic that without a race of such singers to cope with them, they disappear. *Pasquale* is middle of the road. It is neither comic opera nor operetta. It is a chestnut from the late years of a brief, dazzling life. Maybe Donizetti wrote it for himself. The fun, after all, is tinged with a strange melancholic ring, with suggestions of the good-bye with no return. This aspect was grabbed by the producer, Walid Aouni, who twisted the ridiculous to the macabre to the elegiac and back again to farce with the same *bravura* he showed in *Agatha*.

Among the dark tribes of opera directors there is a battle order — "do what you like with the libretto, but hands off the music". *Traviata* can be produced in a Hollywood swimming pool and Brunnhilde can be put into a body stocking or brown paper bag, but the music stays put.

Aouni ruffled the local waters by setting *Pasquale* in Lebanon during the civil war. Why? Caprice? Not quite. Then why? Because Donizetti's people lead totally disrupted lives. In this production they are air raid victims. They have no possessions beyond money in the bank and besides, the stock market is collapsing. They exist in social chaos. Fortunately oil drums make for quite flexible furniture.

And all this unease is in the music. Even the celebrated, tiny tenor ballad at the end is a fatalistic shrug. Nothing is stable. Everything wobbles. At the time of writing Don Pasquale Donizetti was suffering the disabling effects of the syphilis which caused his death. The music speaks, therefore, with final authority. As for the libretto, comic opera hardly exists. There are only two comic operas of quality: *Die Meistersinger* and *Falstaff*.

Even though the creatures in *Don Pasquale* originate in the *commedia del arte*, they behave like a tribe of jumping blue-bottomed baboons. Aouni has done them the service of making them experience the social upheavals which afflict us all. Nomadism is just around the corner. The producer has almost no chorus, but he has invented a collection of nicely crazed outcasts who carry on gallantly, madly and pointlessly through the mayhem of life. Ionesco might as well have been a visitor to this *Pasquale*.

Aouni has a cast of four singing actors. Raouf Zaidan was never in better, more sharp pointed voice than here. Ashraf Sweilam, in the role of Pasquale, had the subtle task of incinerating the days of 1843 and putting himself and the cast into the legendary rags and fantasies that Donizetti was himself facing. They never seemed to find out anything until too late. The truths are lies, just like the music itself, as Bach knew. The production is a stony, uncomfortable place in which to put an ottocento opera. But it succeeded with its message right to the last minute when, as in an American musical, the joyous cast tripped down stage to the audience and belted out the hit tune. And then Pasquale-Sweilam takes out a gun and shoots the principals. The bald prima donna strikes again.

The role of Norina has a lot of notes, some nasty, and much flouncing about, but Nevin Allouba is no soubrette, rather an actress of power and in the role became a character out of a Mel Brooks film. Whether as nurse offering solace or kicks in the behind or a siren in a feather boa, Allouba sent up the works. Joy and sunbeams for all, but mind the cyanide.

Ernesto was played by tenor Mohamed Abul-Kheir. He made the comedians a team of four. The playing was not of a bombastic oaf, but a kindly, idiotic soldier getting into the action more for laughs than anything else.

Though on the whole it was a success, this *Pasquale* had its faults. The tenor was not Da Stefano and the orchestra was badly placed. Sherif Mohieddin must learn to allow the singers to breathe. It was his first performance of a three-act opera, but he had helped remove the opera from a well-behaved period piece into the world of now -- alive and not a wax work.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra: Opera Gala II: Celebration of Donizetti's Bicentennial Birthday: Stefania Donzelli (soprano), Maria Scogna (mezzo-soprano), Roberto Cruciani (tenor), Stefano Secco (tenor), Riccardo Marcucci (baritone), Davide Ruberti (bass); Carlo Magni, conductor; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 4 October

Opera must leave the board room or the conditions outside technical and social, will kill it. It will become a memory freak like the dodo. This concert, holding out great promise of exciting things, turned out to be board room opera. Pleasant, but with no spark flying.

The *bel canto* golden age of Italian opera of which this evening's pieces form a part was brought to an end by the performance of Verdi's first success *Nabucco*.

This concert opened with the first of three sections of Donizetti's most sensational opera, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, which was a centre piece of the Italian romantic movement. On the crest of a wave, melody genius Donizetti created this opera from fountains of florid notes and the strong plot of the Walter Scott novel: lust, murder and retribution in the romantic mists of the Scottish Highlands. On the wedding night into which Lucy has been man-handled by an incestuous brother, she murders the unfortunate husband then kills herself. This is not the end, not by any means. The opera goes on, flowing over into music drama with the true love of the heroine, the tenor, taking the stage for a scene which even today gives a great voice the chance to walk away with the opera even if Callas is singing the murderess.

To begin the concert was the baritone *aria* of Lucy's brother which sets the baleful tone of the opera. The Cairo Symphony had a field night with Donizetti. He was the master of his own style. The music thrills, it is self-confident, but neither mannered nor pretentious. Simple genius flowed through most of the 76 operas completed before he died in 1848 aged 51. He polished off two operas a year in his greatest days. This, the show-stopping celebrated *aria*, began with a call to battle. The orchestra strums dramatically, then we are off on wings of song and *roulades* into the ottocento, flying note land, the heaven of the golden age of singers. These melodies were effortless, never repetitive. There was nothing to do but sing them, and audiences floated on the gold of the sounds. One grew up on Donizetti and he never let anyone down.

Then the tenor had an aria from that other comic opera, *L'Elisir d'Amore*, which is still staple tenor material. To be a tenor you must sing "Una Furtiva Lagrima". This tenor gave a sweet and warm performance.

After this came a stately mezzo, Maria Scogna, to sing "O mio Fernando", the big aria from Donizetti's French opera *La Favorita*. Scogna was effortless and full voiced and looked splendid.

Lucia again with what they used to call *the* love duet. Soprana Stefania Donzelli and tenor Stefano Secco sang well, but as with all the *Lucia* pieces performed this evening, there was no sense of drama or conflict. They sang along nicely, delivered well, but the spell was missing. The stirring climaxes seemed not to move the singers much.

Then the visiting board room team gave their version of chunks of *Don Pasquale* in the original Italian. Nowhere near as good as the Akhenaten team's English version which won hands down. Strange, the English language like the Arabic is accused of not being the tongue of song. The Italian is considered the very home of it. Yet it was the Italians who seemed out of place in the repartée and ridiculous plotting that was so spot on in the English version. The Italians seemed too well-mannered to spotlight the Donizettian situations.

Then — how is Lucy's wedding night getting on in Scotland? Disastrously. The concert ended with the greatest concerted number in all Italian opera. Even Verdi could not surpass it, the *Lucia* sextet.

All the visiting singers sang and the orchestra was grand — and that was all. Maybe the *Lucia* sextet needs to be led up to to be climactic at all. This number fell flat. No majestical tempo, it was too quick. This was a neat suburban dining room, not the grand hall of Scots' baronial castle. In spite of the generous high notes of the soprano, it was bye bye Lucy, have a good day and mind how you go.

Art

The ripple effect

Nigel Ryan discovers that a rose is and is not a rose

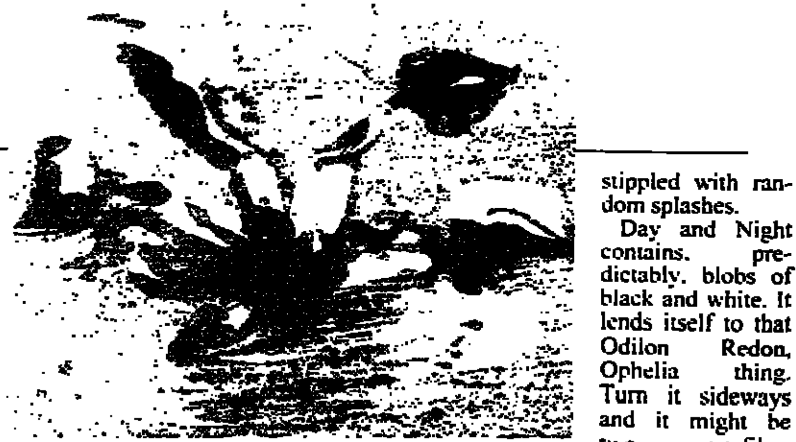
He who drinks from the Nile manifests, in these post-industrialisation days, little beyond a death wish. And the artist who chooses such a symbolically loaded site as the subject for an entire exhibition might be considered equally foolhardy. The old formula, that Egypt is the gift of the Nile, can, after all, be conveniently reversed. The Nile, wherever its source might be, is Egypt's invention. Egypt's gift to the world. To paint it is to paint a history.

To combine this water with a rose, the Nile rose, multiplies the iconographic portent, saturating the solution, compounding the signifier until it is in danger of sinking beneath the impossible weight of possible meanings. Yet it is the Nile rose, that fleshy little tuber with its faintly indecent flower, that forms both the occasional subject and title of Mohamed Abla's latest exhibition, currently showing at the Mashrabiya Gallery.

A singular florilegium, a narrowly focused floral anthology, is one possible result, though Abla has avoided anything so botanically straight-jacketed largely through the conceit of avoiding the flower itself. Some blooms do appear, the most amusing being those constructed out of gold lurex, but these are water lilies, not Nile roses, and one half expects to see a Japanese bridge in the background. You can, at least two of these paintings suggest, gild a Lilly, though whether or not you would want to is largely a matter of taste. But at least these lurex lilies are fun, having gathered a little sheen on their journey from Giverny.

The Nile rose, when it does make its appearance, does so most convincingly in stylised, decorative forms. This is the secessionist Nile rose, a proto-modernist flower that has travelled from Vienna to Cairo via Charles Renee Mackintosh. It is sinuous, and a little too obviously phallic, but only passively so. Given the art nouveau lineage of such forms, to expect something more thrusting is to expect too much. Do not be fooled though, for like so many objects with the same pedigree, these roses have a sting in the tail. Get too close, try and sniff the odour of these strange, black tulips, and they may well spit in your eye.

So much for the flowers. For the rest of the exhibition the Nile itself gets a little lost, atomised, perhaps, in its own surface reflections. Water, of course, lends itself to reflection, though this is exclusively a function of surface. To think water, and then to think depth, is to make an elementary mistake, unless, of course, one is suicidally inclined. The figures that wade out into the water, in several largely monochromatic works, appear to exist simply to make ripples on the surface, against which they can then be silhouetted. Quite why is anyone's guess. A technical exercise? Perhaps. Concentric ripples around a wading, or standing form, are not, after all, the result of studied observation. But is there any meaning beyond the formal, beyond the formula?



In a series of increasingly abstract paintings, intentions are putatively supplied by the titles, though, as a general rule of thumb it is perhaps wisest to give a wide berth to abstract works that boast titles such as Anxieties, or Attempts at Silence. Yet even here water remains a presence, an illusion created by splashing, and by combing the paint horizontally, after brushing vertically, or by applying encaustic, semi-translucent, like floating gunge, so that, at least in parts, these resemble details, notes towards something much larger. They appear, despite the hints of the titles, far less convincing than the monochromatic pieces in which the surface wash is stippled with random splashes.

Day and Night contains, predictably, blobs of black and white. It lends itself to that Odilon Redon, Ophelia thing. Turn it sideways and it might be two profiles, though this is no more fruitful an exercise than psychoanalytic blob identification. Such free association, though, may well be the source of the titles.

The best of these abstract works are the largest and least fragmented. Not the piece comprising nine of the smaller paintings gathered, seemingly arbitrarily, around a central panel comprising an overpainted mirror. Though surface is everything this is really a little too tricksy. But the two largest abstracts come to appear impressive enough, perhaps because they provide, at last, a surface expansive enough on which to work.

Water, then, water, water everywhere, though only occasionally providing a surface over which the artist can skate. And as for the rose? Hardly a bed of crimson joy, but then these are post-Romantic roses, fleshy little art nouveau tubers, floating the length of the longest river, rootlessly meandering their way to the sea.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Mohssen Shaalan
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm.

Sayed Mohamed Sayed (Paintings)
Monet Gallery, 6 Abul Thamin Sq, off Tanta St, Mohandessin. Tel 345 3894. Daily 10am-3pm & 6pm-10pm. Until 9 Oct.

Student Exhibition
Russian Cultural Centre in Alexandria, 5 Batalsa St, Bab Sharky. Tel (03) 482 5645. Until 15 Oct.

Adly Rizkallah (Watercolours)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montazah, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 16 Oct.

Sobhi Guirguis (Sculpture)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 17 October.

Zakaria El-Qadous (Paintings)
Anfoushi Cultural Palace, by the fish market, Anfoushi, Alexandria. Opening 15 Oct, 7pm. Daily 10am-1.30pm & 5pm-10pm. Until 21 Oct.

1952, The Last Protocol: Official Coverage of Egypt's Royal Family at Work and Play
Sony Gallery for Still Photography, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5422. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 23 Oct.
Thirty-six black and white stills taken by court photographers.

Heinrich Böll: His Life and Works (Documents)
Goethe Institute, Language Studies Department, 14 Hussein Wassef St, Missaha Sq, Dokki. Tel 348 4500. Until 23 Oct.

Group Exhibition
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 23 Oct.
Works by Hussein Becar, Mostafa Hussein and Makram Hunein.

Marco Hillen (Photographs)
Cairo Atelier, 2, Karim El-Dawla St, Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Opening 12 Oct, 7pm. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 6pm-10pm. Until 24 Oct.
Stills under the title Genuine Artists From the Egyptian Countryside.

The Andalusian Ornamental Spirit
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-9pm. 13-28 Oct.
Cidney Roach, Michel Pastores, Sylva Nasrallah and Evelyne Porret exhibit ceramic works, engravings and textile works.

Refaat Zaki (Drawings)
Donia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Doctors' Tower, Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8367. Opening 12 Oct, 7pm. Daily 12noon-10pm. Until 30 Oct.

Bookmarkers
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Opening 15 Oct, 7pm. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10amp2pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 30 Oct.
A collection of 80 bookmarkers, from the 1930s to the 1990s.

Mohamed Abla (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-9pm. Until 30 Oct.
Works under the title Ward El-Nil.

Franz Kafka
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. Opening 10 Oct, 7pm. Until 30 Oct.

Susanne Popelka (Paintings)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Gundi St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, noon-8pm. Until 30 Oct.
New works portraying masks, eyes and bodies.

FILMS

French Films
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679.
12, 13 & 14 Oct, 4pm: **Le Roi et L'Oiseau** (1980). Animated feature film by Paul Grimault.
12 & 14 Oct, 7pm: **Van Gogh** (1990). Directed by Maurice Pialat.

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
11 Oct, 6.30pm: **Storia di Piera** (1983).
12 Oct, 6.30pm: **Il Futuro E Donna** (1984).
Both films are directed by M. Ferreri.

Muddy River
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 9 Oct, 6pm.
Directed by Kohei Oguri (1981).

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

The Lost World
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Steven Spielberg's sequel to Jurassic Park.

Volcano
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm.
Following the tradition of natural disasters, is a huge production starring Tommy Lee Jones.

The Saint
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
With Val Kilmer and Elisabeth Shue.

To Die For
Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Nicole Kidman.

Double Team
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Jean-Claude Van Damme, Dennis Rodman and Mickey Rourke.

Ransom
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Thur-Sat, midnight show.
With Mel Gibson and Rene Russo.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Odeon II, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown. Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6.pm & 9.pm.
With Hanan Tork, Khaled El-Nabawi, Mohamed Heneidi and singer Mohamed Fouad.

Afrit El-Nahar (Daytime Demon)
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon I, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown, Tel 575 8797. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm.
With Nour El-Sherif and Elham Shahin.

El-Masir (Le Destin)
Odeon III, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown, Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 591 6095. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Kathak Dance

With Nour El-Sherif, Leila Elwi, Mahmoud Hemeida and Safeiya El-Emari.

El-Qobtan (The Captain)
Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz.

DANCE

Kathak Dance and Hindustani Flute

9 Oct: Cultural Palace, Port Said
10 Oct: Suez Cultural Palace, Suez city.
11 Oct: Cultural Palace, Mansoura
12 Oct: Menoufiya Uniersity, Menoufiya
13 Oct: Cultural Palace, 6th October City, Alexandria desert road
For more information, contact the Indian Embassy in Cairo, tel 392 5243.

MUSIC

Mohamed Abdel-Wahab Ensemble for Arabic Music and Songs
Mubarak Library, 70 El-Nil St, Giza. Tel (Goethe Institute) 575 9877. 9 Oct, 7pm.
Directed by Kadry Serour, the ensemble performs "Songs and Music Inherited From the Past".

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 9 Oct, 8pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Master Symphony III
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 11 Oct, 8pm.
The Cairo Symphony Orchestra, accompanied by Taheya Shamseddin (soprano) and Hassan Sharara (violin) perform Kodaly's Dances from Galanta, Tchaikovsky's Concerto for violin and orchestra in D-major op. 35 and Mahler's Symphony No. 4, under Hungarian conductor Thomas Koncz.

Violin and Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 11 Oct, 8pm.

Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 12 Oct, 8pm.
David Edgard performs.

Egyptian Children and Youth Choir
Gomhouriya Theatre, 12 Gomhoriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 12 Oct, 8pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

THEATRE

The Metamorphosis
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. 14 & 15 Oct, 8pm.
A stage adaptation, in Arabic, of Franz Kafka's novella, directed by Nemer Salamoune.

El-Darafil (The Dolphins)
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily, 7pm. Until 16 Oct.
Scripted by Khaled El-Sawi, directed by Hassan Abdou and performed by the Theatre Atelier Company.

Bahleol Fi Istambul
Hilton Ramsis Theatre, Hilton Ramsis annex, El-Galaa St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm; Fri, 8.30pm
With Samir Ghanem, Elham Shahin and Bothayna Rashwan.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Sat & Sun 10pm; Mon 8pm.
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhi.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Weds & Thurs, 10pm; Fri 8pm.
Directed by Mohamed Sobhi.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
With Adel Imam; directed by Sherif Arafa.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
Directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Cromb, Zabadi (Cabbage, Yogurt)
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10pm; Mon & Fri, 8pm
Said Saleh, Ahmed Bedeir and legendary dancer Nagwa Fouad, directed by Essam El-Sayed.

Taraima II (Melody II)
El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 10pm.
Directed by Entessar Abdel-Fattah.

Leila Foll (Jasmine Night)
Floating Theatre, Adjacent to University Bridge, Manial. Tel 364 9516. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.
Mahmoud El-Alfi directs Ola Rami, Emad Rashad, Mohamed Farid and singer Ahmed Ibrahim.

Senouhi
National, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 9.30pm.
Directed by Teymour Abashedzi.

El-Qa'eda Wal Estethna' (The Rule and the Exception)
El-Zorqani Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel. 591 7783. Daily 8.30pm.
With Mohamed Anani and Hamada Abdel-Halim, directed by Mamdouh Aql.

Alabanda
El-Fardos Theatre, El-Beohth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 9.30pm. With Lucy, Sherif Mounir, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Mohamed Heneidi and Alaa Waleyeddin; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Ayam El-Insan El-Sab'a (The Seven Days of Man)
El-Ghouri Palace, El-Azhar, El-Hossein. Tel 511 0472. Daily 10pm.
Directed by Nasser Abdel-Moneim.

LECTURES

The Murals from the Church of Archangel Gubrail in Naqlun
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 9 Oct, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Professor Wlodzimierz Godlewski, Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw.

The Middle East Peace Process: An Uncertain Future
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5423. 13 Oct. 5pm.
Lecture and panel discussion by Dr Osama El-Baz, political advisor to President Mubarak, Dr Nassif Hitti and Dr Mostafa El-Sayed, professors of Political Science, AUC.

Contents and Containers: The Canaanite Jar in the New Kingdom
Egypt Exploration Society, British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 0319. 13 Oct, 7pm.
Lecture by Janine Bourrian, research fellow, University of Cambridge.

Teaching French in Egypt
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya Sr, Mounira. Tel 354 4095. 15 Oct, 7pm.
Lecture by Gilles Thuaudet, French cultural attaché in Cairo.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by
Injy El-Kashef

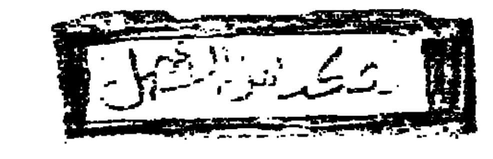
Around the galleries

SCULPTURES and paintings by **Sobhi Girgis** are currently on show at **Espace**. The deliberate elimination of lustre in the treatment of surface is an interesting feature of these sculptures which, in turn, form the subject matter of the paintings.

Sculptures by **Bassada Yaaqoub** are on show at **Extra Gallery**. These, mostly of flora and fauna, pay meticulous attention to detail.

Reviewed by
Nagwa El-Ashri


Sobhi Girgis



Critical condition

Nehad Selaiha plunges into the ongoing controversy surrounding an Egyptian production that played on CIFET's fringe

Weeks on, the storm whipped up by Samir Gharib's virulent lambasting of the Egyptian critics in the last issue of CIFET's daily bulletin is still raging. The verbal assault by the head of the Cultural Development Fund was mainly targeted at the distinguished five member committee entrusted with the choice of the two Egyptian entries in the festival's competition, but the flying shrapnel spread over a much wider area, hitting almost every (critical) body. According to Gharib, the failure of the committee to select Hani Ghanem's *Journey*, sponsored by the Fund, was a tragic error which not only cost Egypt the virtual certainty of winning one of the awards, but also revealed a shockingly stuffy and parochial attitude to theatre. Equally shocking, in Gharib's view, was the widespread critical neglect of the show (the only truly experimental Egyptian work in the whole festival, according to him) which amounted to almost criminal negligence. If the critics had been busy attending the sessions of the central seminar on women's theatre or the various talks given by such prominent festival guests as Augusto Boal and Robert Brustein, Gharib implied, he might have forgiven them; unfortunately, however, they were conspicuous by their absence.

Gharib's admonitions have stirred up a hornets' nest which is still buzzing vigorously. The critics were quick to retort and the responses ranged from angry denials to vicious recriminations. Two members of the committee robustly asserted that they had been in favour of the *Journey* from the start and had fought for it till the end. A third smugly and self-righteously prided herself on having rejected the show as "immoral, full of nudity and sexual perversion", declaring that if she were called upon to chose a second time she would refuse it yet again. She had done it all for the festival, she explained: it was dangerous for the festival, she said, to have a show representing Egypt which blatantly violated moral taboos. (Eager audiences who flocked to the play lured by this spicy, albeit inadvertent, publicity were sorely disappointed.) Of the remaining two members of the committee, one dismissed the work as "amateurish" on the grounds that it "did not observe the rules of drama" (!), while the other opted for a wishy-washy attitude, allegedly dismissing the show in the committee's closed sessions while claiming in public that he had supported it. The divisions within the committee provided the wider critical community with a handy excuse with which to defend themselves against Gharib's charge of laxity and indifference. Some of their statements provided some of the best comedy we have seen this season, and not on the boards. First prize goes to the critic who made a virtue of not having seen the show, stoutly declared that he would never go to see it because he had heard it was immoral, then proceeded to dismiss it on the ground that it a) contained nudity and sexual perversion, b) was a free adaptation of a "completely unknown, mysterious" text which nobody had ever heard of (Brecht's *Seven Deadly Sins*) and c) that in any case, he was against the idea of adaptation on principle.

Other critics were not so innocently and amusingly misguided. One particularly venomous review carried the title "Satan Worshippers" and alarmingly called for an immediate investigation of the activities of this group of moral "perverts" who, according to him, had beguiled the innocent, unsuspecting Cultural Development Fund into subsidising their subversive aims. The reviewer was clearly and directly capitalising on the reader's memories of the recent widely publicised arrests and trials of groups of young people accused of "Satan worship", and the really disturbing thing is that he could not have been unaware of the dangerous implications of his words. A few years ago, a similar critical witch-hunt had led to the public humiliation, and precipitated the downfall, of a brilliant young director, Mansour Mohamed, who subsequently died a year later of a heart attack at the age of 32. In Mohammed's *The Game*, the sight of a belly-dancer atop a structure representing El-Kaaba on one side and an oil barrel on the other had virtually everybody howling for his blood.

Nothing so shocking in the *Journey*, and yet some critics seem grimly intent on making of Hani Ghanem another CIFET sacrificial lamb. I have watched this Egyptian version of Brecht's *Die Sieben Todsunden der Kleinburger* twice, first at the Goethe Institute last year, then, in its more developed form this year during CIFET at the enchanting Maison Zeinab Khatoun, and, on both occasions, there was not one single broken taboo on sight. Of the rabidly denounced "nudity" there was nothing more than the usual quota of bare arms and legs and male torsos allowed on the Egyptian stage (minus the sexual titillation) except that in this case more of the male, rather than the female, body was exposed. (Is this what nettles the male reviewers and has shocked the female member of the selection committee? One wonders! And why is it alright to have semi-nude female dancers exposed to the male "gaze" in all our commercial theatres and not at all right to have a semi-nude male rolling in the mud in a depressingly bare room without any finery or glitter?) As for the so-called "sexual perversion", I am quite at a loss where to locate it unless we regard childbirth, a woman feeling her breasts (we are advised by gynaecologists to do so regularly to detect early tumors), a gluttonous priest attending a dying person (*death* in itself is sufficiently obscene, as someone once shrewdly remarked), a young man fondling a rag doll, a young woman alternately gazing at herself in a small mirror and looking out of a *mashrabia* window, a woman doing her washing manually, and getting progressively more and more exhausted, within sight of an old, battered and antiquated washing machine overflowing with suds, as acts denoting "sexual perversion".



Zeinab Khatoun House — a house to ghosts

I suspect that the offending article was the small wooden wheel which one of the two actresses (Brecht's two Annas) held between her legs turning it rhythmically as a substitute for the sexual gratification denied her by social taboos. In this cynically ironical "boy-meets-girl" scene, the "coy mistress" at once invites and repels the lover; he stridently advances towards her, then halts in mid-career and freezes. When he finally tires of trying to wade up the clogged stream that separates them, he, after many frustrated, and frustrating, freezes, retires to a corner of the room to console himself with a rag doll. The woman, in her turn, retires behind a screen and gets to work with her wheel, transforming it into an arid symbol of the cycle of life.

In Brecht's *Seven Deadly* bourgeois *Sins*, a ballet cantata for which Kurt Weil composed the music, two sisters — Anna I and Anna II — set out into the world to earn enough money to build a house for their family in Louisiana, and in the course of their journey, visit seven cities in each of which they are tempted by one of the deadly sins. In this political parable, the sins are portrayed in the figure of transgressions against capitalist society. In Ghanem's *Journey*, however, the family house is already too solidly there and bears in its fascinating architecture all the signs of the patriarchal value system. As in all "environmental theatre" and "performance art" works, not only audience participation, but audience perambulation as well is absolutely required, and the burden of the process of meaning-production falls squarely on the shoulders of the viewer.

For some, Hani Ghanem's *Journey* (a fantastic guided night tour of the Zeinab Khatoun House, with a crazy dervish in rags as the guide, and nothing but the thin light of his torch to help us make our way through the narrow passages of the house and up its steep stairways) felt like a vivid, metaphoric reliving of life's journey between birth and death. The seven rooms evoked not just Brecht's seven cities, but also, through the visually riveting scenes they contained, the seven stages of human life so eloquently listed and described by Shakespeare's Jaques in *As You Like It*. For others, among whom I number myself, it felt like a pungently acid portrayal of the lot of women in the third world — perhaps the world over. From the labour of birth (with Shahira astride a tar-blackened barrel and wired up to a mass of plastic tubes) through the pangs of waiting for the "knight in shining armour" and the shy, guilty exploration of the body, to the burying and mourning of sons and husbands killed in war, the tour felt like an oppressive nightmare. And what a relief it was to emerge from the memories-encrusted rooms into the open courtyard.

But there, all the ghosts and shadows of those who once inhabited the house surrounded you and danced around you in their black cloaks, in the dark, to a miscellany of tunes that dizzily evoked various cultures. The next moment, they were up there, on a high terrace, still shrouded in darkness, with nothing visible but their faces, lighted up by their small torches. It was an unforgettable sight. I doubt if I shall ever walk into the Zeinab Khatoun House without finding Ghanem's haunting images and figures lurking in the corners.

Books

Have eyes changed?

Alif 17: Literature and anthropology in Africa, ed. Ferial J Ghazoul, AUC Press, Cairo, 1997

African literature has long been underrated in the Arab world. To many Arab readers unfamiliar with the plethora of works emanating from sub-Saharan Africa, African writing is a literature warped by being focussed on race and colour. What emerges from *Alif 17* is that nothing could be further from the truth: African writing is as varicoloured as the continent itself.

Alif 17, the journal of comparative poetics' latest issue focuses on literature and anthropology in Africa. It is a timely publication that introduces readers in Egypt and the Arab world to the somewhat disregarded world of contemporary African writing. How many Egyptian or Arab intellectuals can recall the name of, let alone comfortably discuss the works of Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka? Only a handful of people in this part of the world have been introduced to the works of Ben Okri, Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Alif 17*, gives the reader, unfamiliar with African writing, an ingeniously compiled representative, if not an exactly comprehensive, selection of contemporary African writing.

Alif 17 opens with a scholarly essay by veteran South African sociologist, Archie Mafeje. Mafeje's books include Science, *Ideology and Development* (1979) and *The Theory and Ethnography of African Social Formations* (1991), but his *Alif 17* piece was a trifle too dry and academic, even though very informative.

The lack of familiarity of Arab intellectuals with African writing is sadly reflected in the haphazardly gathered motley of articles in the Arabic section. They focus more on anthropology than on literature, and dwell on what others say about Africa rather than on what Africans say about themselves. In sharp contrast with the impressive range of subjects discussed in *Alif 17*'s English section, the Arabic section is a little vainglorious.

The very breadth of the topics tackled in the English section gives it an added interest. The Arabic section's selection displays an embarrassing lack of awareness and understanding of the issues of vital interest to contemporary African writers. There are, however, some saving graces. Randa Abu-Bakr's "Private Experience as Expression of Socio-Political Reality in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus and Mahmoud Darwish" makes for very interesting reading and so does Fatma Massoud's "The Self-The Other: Africa in the Mirror of German Travellers (1847-1923)."

I have serious reservations about the concept of mixing 19th century European and Arab travelers' accounts of Africa and Darwinian anthropological studies of the Victorian variety, with contemporary African literature in an anthology of African writing. This is the kind of familiarity (with literature about Africa) that inevitably breeds contempt. I was impatient with Abdul-Hamid El-Zein's The Myth of Creation in East Africa. His is the kind of commentary that draws heavy criticism from Africans and politically correct Westerners today. I see red the moment the name Bronislaw Malinowski, the architect of anthropology as an academic subject matter, crops up. El-Zein's notion of myth and its symbolic mode is evidently influenced by the likes of Malinowski.

The piece by Fatma Massoud on the racism of mid-19th century German explorers in Central Africa conjures up images of a benighted and bygone age: comparing the physiques and physical attributes of a wide variety tribal groups in the Lake Chad region of Central Africa. Interestingly enough German explorers, such as Heinrich Barth, Albert Schweitzer and Gustav Nachtigal, were evidently acutely aware of the racism of the Arab traders they come across in that part of Africa.

Randa Abu-Bakr cleverly compares and contrasts the poetry of South Africa's Dennis Brutus and Palestine's Mahmoud Darwish in the context of the anti-apartheid struggle and of Palestinian national self-determination. Abu-Bakr, who is assistant lecturer in the Department of English at Cairo University, skillfully shows the similarities — and significant differences — between political struggles in the then apartheid South Africa and the present Israeli-occupied Palestine.



photo: Djibril Sy

Frances Harding focuses her attention on a curious play written in both English and Idoma, a central Nigerian language, depicting the trials and tribulations of a traditional society doing away with some of its more gruesome customs. According to Harding, "most significant of all is the contribution the play makes to the debate on the dialogue play as a pre-colonial form. Amali's play takes no less than four pre-existing forms of performance — content (narrative), style (verbal play), form (inquest inquiry), and context (women's access to the sphere of knowledge about the sacred) — from within Idoma practice and creates from them a single, new, whole, contemporary work."

The play revolves around the punishment of an Idoma woman, Odegwudegwu, who inadvertently broke a taboo of her people. Idoma women were forbidden to see the tribe's ancestral spirits whose visible forms were embodied within a masquerade. The gruesome punishment for seeing the masquerade was burial alive. According to Idoma legend, the custom of live burial was modified when Odegwudegwu caught sight of the sacred ancestral masquerades as she foraged in the forest for medicinal herbs to heal her sick grandson. She pleaded guilty but petitioned the elders of the tribe to forgive her. Three of her sons, breaking with tradition, declared that they would be buried alongside their mother if she must die. The elders of the tribe relented and commuted Odegwudegwu's death sentence.

Mary Harvan on Ken Saro-Wiwa was brilliant. Harvan's insightful study of Saro-Wiwa's works and life paints a dismal picture of the brutish life of an indigenous people, a numerically small ethnic group literally swamped by oil spills, petroleum companies, the Nigerian government and their far more numerous neighbours. Harvan, a doctoral candidate — the subject of her dissertation is Ken Saro-Wiwa — offers a refreshing alternative to archaic Malinowski-like anthropologists. Hers is a study of an ancient people through the magnifying glass of their most articulate spokesman. In Harvan's piece, the struggles of the ethnic Ogoni and their strategies of resistance are related even as their poet-leader is executed by the Nigerian authorities.

Equally compelling is Virginia Ola's "The End of Their Trial: The Archetypal Female in Thomas Hardy and Ngugi wa Thiong'o." Ola, which drew parallels between Thomas Hardy's heroine Tess and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross*. The two women murder their men — their tormentors. Tess kills her husband "like a pig with a carving knife" and the peasant girl, Wariinga, shoots the Rich Old Man of Ngorika.

Shereen Abou El-Naga explores different aspects of the theme of motherhood in African literature. Abou El-Naga teaches poetry at the English Department of Cairo University, and her comparative study of the poetry of Senegalese Mariama Ba and Ghanaians Ama Ata Aidoo and Abena Busia reveals a well of common experience. "We are all mothers, and we have that fire within us, of powerful women, whose spirits are so angry," writes Abena Busia.

Adel El-Siwi's piece on masks is at times entertaining but leaves one still longing to know more about those artists who make these exemplary African art objects. One of the finest expressions of African art — masks.

Nicholas Hopkins' "Memories of Griots" unmasks the spirit of Africa's unlettered literature . It is indeed memorable. The griots are the African sages and music-makers of the Sahelian countries of Guinea, Mali, and Senegal. They recall the history of their people in song and dance. Sadly, theirs is a dying art and is now just another means of survival. "We are vessels of speech, we are the repositories which harbour secrets many centuries old. The art of eloquence has no secrets for us; without us the names of kings would vanish into oblivion, we are the memory of mankind; by the spoken word we bring to life the deeds and exploits of kings for younger generations," boasted one of West Africa's most famous griots, the Guinean Djibril Tamsir Niane, who excelled at "bringing to life" the ancient epic of Sundianta.

Reviewed by **Gamal Nkrumah**

Plain Talk

It is only natural that we should be jubilant about the October War. The people have the right to celebrate, and there is no doubt that the media, especially television, is giving them the best that money can buy. Singers from a number of Arab countries joined their Egyptian counterparts for the celebrations. And yet, one cannot help asking: has the October War been given its full due?

It seems to me that celebrations of the October War, which shattered the myth of the invincibility of the Israeli army, deserve more than mere entertainment staged from year to year. It deserves something of a more durable, permanent nature: it should have a literature of its own. To be more precise, it deserves a poetry of its own. Why, you may ask, poetry? Well, because, of all literary forms, poetry is the ideal vehicle for man's deepest emotions. As Victor Selwyn says in his dedication of an anthology of second world war poems: "The poet perceives; he feels; he creates; he hands on to posterity and so becomes our history." Selwyn goes on to say: "The tragedy is that it takes a war — kill or be killed — to move man... to write the finest verse, the most moving lines."

But let me pause here to explain what I am aiming at. Both the first and second world wars had their poets. The first had Owen, Sassoon, Graves and Grenfell. Their poems have been included in anthologies assigned at schools. We were taught, and I still remember almost by heart, Wilfred Owen's poem "Strange Meeting", in which he describes his imaginary after-life meeting with a dead German soldier. Some lines can never be forgotten:
"'Strange friend', I said, 'here is no cause to mourn'
'None' said the other 'save the undone years,
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life also'."

He goes on until he reaches what I think is a miracle of expression: "I am the enemy you killed, my friend."

The poets of the second world war were different. While in the first world war it was those poets who went to war who produced war poetry, in the second world war it was ordinary soldiers who became poets as a result of going to war. The second world war produced two anthologies: *Oasis*, which was published and printed in Cairo, and, later, *Return to Oasis*. The choice of the title is significant since the poetry of the war came from the troops fighting in the desert. Over two hundred army personnel contributed to the two anthologies which received funding from the army.

Many explanations have been advanced to account for the difference between the poetry of the first world war and the second. As the introduction to the second world war *Oasis* anthology puts it: "Whereas in the first world war, huge masses of men were directed from afar, in the second world war more men felt personally involved." Thus we find Almendro writing
"To-day I killed a man. God forgive me!
To-morrow I shall sow another political corpse
Or be dead myself."

Going through the two anthologies, *Oasis* and *Return to Oasis*, one can see how much they provide a new, full and vivid reflection of the events of the wartime years and the emotions they stirred. As Selwyn aptly puts it: "This record of the time is expressed in the poetry written there and then by those who served. Thus this book becomes more than a collection of poems. It is history, too, seen with the poet's perceptive eye."

In their choice of poems, just over 200 out of thousands, the editors "had somehow to achieve a balance between the purely literary merit of a poem and its value as a record of a historic event." Because the poems were written by combatants during the war, they have a certain immediacy that cannot be recreated in later years. These are not eulogies of victories written by professional poets who never carried a gun, let alone used it.

War poems are a cry from the heart of ordinary people, wrenched from them by the events. Finally, I would say that wars can always be taught as part of history, but they will be remembered and immortalised by the creative writings, especially the poetry, written by those who fought them.

Mursi Saad El-Din

A sporting chance

The Gezira Sporting Club has been, for the best part of this century, the stomping ground of a cosmopolitan elite. Last year, *Al-Ahram Weekly* reported that the club, having long lost its claim to international distinction, had become a battleground where several groups vying for its control were engaged in open confrontation. Tomorrow, the members are going to the polls. **Fayza Hassan** wonders who will get the spoils

Originally planned for the greatest comfort of a couple of thousand members, today the Gezira Sporting Club uncannily resembles some of the more overcrowded quarters of Cairo, cracking at the seams, its amenities taxed twenty times over, its grounds neglected and its services far below par.

In 1990, with the club's membership in the five figures and soaring (at 25,000 families, or 100,000 members), and its management problems akin to the difficulties Sysiphus once experienced with his rock, Dr Hashem Fouad was elected to the chairmanship of the board of directors by a majority of members who believed he was the man to reverse the downward tide. He was famous for having turned Qasr El-Aini Hospital around when he was dean of the Faculty of Medicine, they reasoned, so why not the Gezira club?

Within five years, however, the honeymoon was over. Fouad having proved to be not too benevolent a ruler. Disappointment at the doctor's performance had set in, with the meetings of the board of directors becoming turbulent affairs where barely veiled accusations of mismanagement were hurled at the chairman by his angry assistants. Last year, Fouad withdrew amid ugly rumours, provoking divisions among the club and the board members.

To stop the furore, which threatened to degenerate into pitched battles on the green, Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri appointed former Prime Minister Aziz Sedqi as interim chairman of the board while an inquiry into the club's finances was initiated. General elections were scheduled to take place in October 1997. On the eve of these elections, the situation is as murky as ever, while the club, now the object of what looks like a factional struggle, remains in a state of total neglect.

"One is at a loss to say where to start," says a veteran member. "Should I mention the poor state of the changing rooms, the toilets, which are in complete disrepair, the grass which has stopped growing on the fields, the general lack of maintenance of the grounds, where the trees and shrubs are never watered, or the swimming pools which are far from engaging? The list is so extensive that I have to wonder who, among the candidates to the board or its chairmanship, is capable of providing a practical remedy."

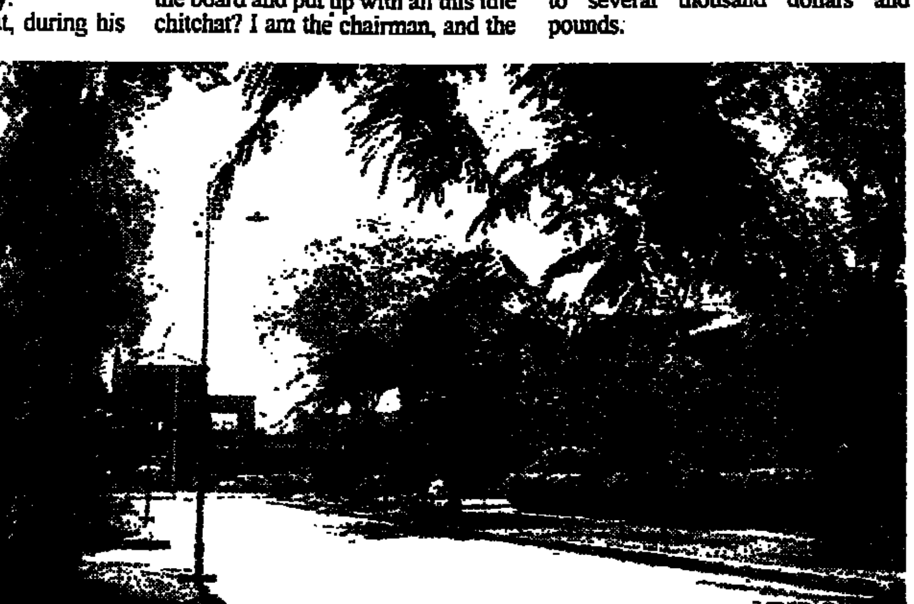
It is quite obvious that, during his year in charge of the club, Aziz Sedqi has not accomplished as much as was expected, though several members concede that some of the problems were addressed. The restaurant, for instance, is in better shape, and the quality of the food has improved.

In a brief telephone conversation with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Sedqi stated that he did not wish to comment on the past or the future of the club, nor even on the achievements of the past year.

"The problem," says another member, "is that we are presented with electoral lists. We seldom know the candidates, and they have not presented the members with a programme — that is, assuming that they have one. All we know is that they wish to be elected. Why are they so keen? After all, running a club like the Gezira is hard work and really requires a team of professional managers. What qualifies them for the task and why should we vote for them?" At this point, the candidates seem to be relying on their supporters and friends rather than on the presentation of a coherent programme which might entice members outside their coterie.

According to his detractors, Hashem Fouad is a despot who has repeatedly ignored his board of directors and ruled with an iron fist, always according to his own best judgement. In an interview with the *Weekly* last year, Fouad readily admitted that he had no need for the board. "I know what has to be done and I do it, it is as simple as that. Why should I call for a meeting of the board and put up with all this idle chitchat? I am the chairman, and the chairman is there to make decisions," he said, dismissing the idea of democratic process as well as that of having limits placed on his power. This year, in an interview with *Al-Ahram*, Fouad explained that he has always been particularly intent on abiding by the law and this may have made him sound dictatorial at times.

The list of contraventions that occurred during Fouad's "reign" are several pages long and have attracted the attention of the Egyptian press for the past several weeks. They include misappropriation of funds, embezzlement by various employees, misspending of the club's monies, general lack of supervision of the accounts as well as doctoring of the annual budget — to cite just a few points of contention. While Fouad's honesty is not in question, his wisdom in the choice of his assistants is. Furthermore, he has been accused of overextending his power by waiving registration and other membership fees in several cases without consulting the board, depriving the club of a rightful revenue which amounts to several thousand dollars and pounds.



In the good old days, when room was not a problem

Fouad does not deny having granted complimentary memberships, but considers that his actions were within the rights of the chairman of the board. On the other hand, he does not believe that scrutinising the accounts was ever his responsibility. "We hired a reputable firm of accountants, it is their job to see that everything is in order," he said, dismissing similarly the accusation of having left the club's monies in a current account which earned no interest for over five years.

Tomorrow, Gezira Sporting Club members will be casting their votes, and Fouad, undaunted and true to the promise he made his supporters last year, is vying once more for the chairmanship. "He may make it once more," says one of his detractors sorrowfully.

Why would the members want to re-elect the controversial doctor? Basically, because his opponents have not come forth with a serious programme, and have not even considered the introduction of such elementary aids as the creation of a database on which to rely when planning extensions of facilities or new ventures, or polls to recognise the members's needs and wishes. Furthermore, they have shown no desire to turn to more up-to-date methods of management; in other words, new members of the board will have nothing new to offer, and no remedies for the sorry state the ailing club is now in. Nor do they seem suited to the positions they covet, in terms of management skills or the number of hours they will be able to devote to the job.

At this point, one would not err much in surmising that many members have just lost interest, simply fearing that *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*, while others will endeavour to have their own candidates elected, for reasons which are not necessarily in the best interests of the club as a whole.

The candidate lists, which are readily circulated and/or mailed — often in duplicate — to prospective voters, only detail the curriculum vitae of the competitors. Their achievements are impressive. There is an abundance of the highest degrees in surgery, dentistry, engineering, accounting and commerce, names which by rights should be in the Egyptian Who's Who; but does their social, academic and professional status entitle them to run the club? Businessman Ramzi Roushdi, Hashem Fouad's most serious contender, has indicated that, should he win, he will rely on a professional management firm to run the club, while Maged Abaza, another important competitor in the race for the chairmanship, would be able to draw on his experience in hotel management. At this point, however, isn't all this too little, too late?

Urban sanctuary

Mariz Tadros visits an urban resettlement site on the Muqqatam, where a local NGO is actively seeking solutions to some age-old urban problems

For two long years, 19-year-old Azza worked at a clothes factory for 10 or 11 hours a day to help her family pay for LE74 a month in rent. Following the 1992 October earthquake which brought their home tumbling down, Azza's family together with some 5,000 others were resettled at El-Hadaba El-Wusta, the middle plateau of the Muqqatam. Today, Azza attends daily literacy classes held by the Egyptian Society for the Development of Local Communities (ESDLC), hoping that the certificate she *will* receive upon completion of the course will make her eligible for formal education.

For the families who were resettled in the desert that is El-Hadaba El-Wusta, the new situation has provoked crises which their counterparts in other resettled areas might not have encountered. Families resettled elsewhere were helped by organisations which eased integration into their new environment. At El-Hadaba El-Wusta, the people were left to cope as they could. Nor was the infrastructure completely in place — until very recently, the inhabitants paid what they consider a fortune for the water tanks they received by lorry.

Now Azza's family and thousands of others are suffering the impact of rising rents. While they were not expected to pay rent during the first couple of years, they are now expected to pay not just the monthly rent, but also the rent for previous years. Families who were used to paying LE4 in low-income districts are now confronted with bills of LE50 a month and more.

Most of these families work on a highly irregular basis in the informal sector, and suffer the typical problems of poverty-stricken under-serviced urban settlements, but they also have to contend with additional costs such as daily transport to the bottom of the mountain. Lacking such amenities as public hospitals, secondary schools, markets and even bakeries, the neighbourhood is in many ways more deprived than other impoverished sections of Cairo.

The fact that families were displaced from all over Cairo's slums after the earthquake has produced an uneasy melting pot. The abrupt melange did not exactly inspire a spirit of solidarity amongst the families, which is considered integral to community-building in a new setting.

In 1993, the ESDLC was established in the area, the only NGO with a presence there. Set up on a purely volunteer basis, it could not operate on the scale of other development organisations. It had neither the resources, the staff nor the background expertise in development work. Unlike the majority of development projects or charity organisations, the ESDLC is not a local NGO operating on international funding; nor is it funded exclusively by the government. Rather, explains Mona Qorashi, its director, a tripartite relationship was established between the ESDLC, the government and the private sector.

This set-up has several advantages. "We don't feel that we are constricted by following a particular internationally-oriented agenda or that we have to be accountable for every decision we make", explains Qorashi, adding that local, rather than foreign funding is a better guarantee for sustainability. "You can be sure that money will be given every year through the private sector, because they are making their profits." And what is in it for them? Apart from the prestige and the PR, Qorashi points out that many businessmen are now more open to investing their funds into a development-oriented NGO (if transparency is guaranteed).

The ESDLC has set up income-generating projects for housewives, typing and computer services for youth seeking better qualifications for employment, and awareness programmes.

The National Agency for the Eradication of Illiteracy, a branch of the Ministry of Education, uses the NGO's premises for literacy classes. To encourage women and girls to attend literacy classes, the ESDLC has made quarterly donations contingent upon attendance. "This way, we are using charity which is very much needed to promote our development goals," says Qorashi.

Samir Abdel-Saber, supervisor from the National Agency for the Eradication of Illiteracy, says, however, that the strategy is in many ways "a two-edged sword. On one hand, it may act as an incentive to boost attendance; on the other, people sometimes just attend to get the money. They don't want to learn, they're just there to meet an obligation, especially for the older age group."

In the absence of community leaders, social workers and sufficient volunteers, ESDLC still operates on a top-down basis, where the personal efforts and contacts of the director determine how the services are provided. This is a major challenge for all NGOs — to provide the necessary services while maintaining the interest and participation of the local community.

Pot Pourri

Taken for a ride

No one in their right mind is willing to drive and attempt to park their car downtown. It is, therefore, little wonder that, if one has in fact successfully accomplished this feat, defying all the rules of logic, and finally squeezed one's vehicle into the first parking space available, atop a garbage heap or in the middle of a puddle, between the big bus and the battered Fiat, one is wont to abandon it there for the day, resigned to the fact that someone will almost certainly put a dent in it while forcing their way out of the parking lot. Exhausted by the drive, car owners usually have just enough energy left to thank heaven a thousand times over for the blessing of taxis, which will provide reasonably comfortable short-distance transport, from one gridlocked street to the next.

Downtown taxis and their drivers are a species of their own, however, and should be approached with care and, if possible, a selective eye. With a bit of luck, one gets to ride in a sleek *little affair conducted by a polite driver* who may not necessarily be bent on destroying one's aural apparatus, and may even ask if one wishes him to turn the music down. He will accept his fare silently and even wait long enough for his passenger to alight from the vehicle without compromising his/her dignity.

A word of warning, though: this variety is not common, and one cannot expect to meet such an ideal combination every day of the week. Rather, chances are that one will be confronted with the most common type of taxi driver, one who comes across as quite friendly, though a trifle talkative for one's taste, maybe. He is bored and yearning for a little chat. He observes his passenger in his mirror while fiddling with his screeching car radio. After a while, he gives up on the various maladjusted buttons and inserts a very old tape, usually a popular hit which gives him his opening line: "Do you like Amr Diab, or would you rather listen to Umm Kalthoum?" He may then proffer his pack of cigarettes with one hand while beating the tempo on the horn with the other.

He knows everyone, and waves to other taxi drivers, peddlers, and traffic policemen, with whom he discusses the current football match at traffic lights. He may stop long enough to accept a glass of tea handed to him by the waiter of the café he frequents. If you are not in a mad hurry, you have no reason to expect any unpleasantness from this kind of driver.

Try to avoid taxi drivers who look at you for a long time, as if weighing their chances of ripping you off, those who want to know where you are going before unlatching the door and those who open the front passenger's door if you are a woman. These are definitely not to be trusted.

Assessing both the driver and his vehicle in the middle of roaring traffic and with another half dozen potential passengers vying for the same means of transportation may be tricky, but one should not be discouraged by the difficulty; with a little experience one will soon be able to fully enjoy this form of public transport within the city.

Mistakes will occur from time to time, for which one should be prepared, however. Some result in mild unpleasantness, while others, infrequently, can turn out to be rather costly. On one occasion, I took a taxi which broke down five minutes after we had set out on my short journey. The driver asked for a loan because, he said, he did not have the means to repair his taxi. I left in a hurry.

Another time the driver stopped on Qasr El-Nil Street and burst into tears while the horns of the cars behind regaled us with a discordant concert. His little girl, he told me, screaming over the din, was in hospital and he needed LE300 in a hurry. I was saved by the fact that I only had LE20, which I promptly handed him before disembarking. A few days later, by mere chance, I happened to ride with him again. Not recognising me, he treated me to a repeat performance of his sob story, on Ramses Street this time, but with less fruitful results.

Last week, my daughter became the victim of the latest unscrupulous scheme taxi drivers have devised to supplement their fare. Alighting from a taxi after a brief ride, she handed the driver the fare, which he accepted graciously. "Can you take this change and give me a twenty-pound note?" he asked, waving a wad of notes. She gave him the twenty, then proceeded to count the change he had given her. "You only gave me LE18.50," she said. "And you, lady, only gave me PT50," replied the driver, showing her a 50-piastre note. "Where are my twenty pounds?" My daughter was speechless. How could she prove that she had given him the right amount? By now, her twenty pounds were in his pocket. Furious, she threw the change in the car and walked away. "Not only was I made a fool of," she complained bitterly, "he made me look as if I had tried to cheat a poor man!"

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Chicken curry

Ingredients:

1 large chicken (cut in 4 parts)
1 large onion (finely chopped)
2 large tomatoes (diced)
1 tsp. crushed garlic
1 green bell pepper (diced)
1 bunch of dill leaves
1 tsp. dried coriander
2 tbsp. curry powder
3 tbsp. vinegar
Salt+pepper+allspice+cinnamon+cumin+ginger
Butter+corn oil

Method:

Lightly season the chicken parts with salt and pepper. Gently fry the onion in some butter and oil. When yellowish, add the garlic and stir for a few seconds. Add the green pepper and stir, then add the chicken parts allowing them to golden in the grease on both sides. Remove chicken parts then add the dill and stir. Add the curry powder, stir it in, then add the tomatoes, the coriander then the vinegar. Add the spices, bring back the chicken parts to the pan, stir them in and add two cups of boiling water. Cover and leave to cook over low heat until chicken parts are cooked. Serve with white rice, mango chutney and a rich green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Sterile living

Andrew Steele lunches in the land of the bland

We were not seated, but we chose a table with a reasonable view of the Empain villa. There, much to our perplexity, lurked a brimming ashtray, rife with all sorts of pickings and crumblings. And there it did indeed remain for the entirety of our visit to Café Le Jardin at the Baron Hotel in Heliopolis. I had had errands to attend to in the hotel, and thought it might provide the opportunity for a light bite. Light or no, the right bite it was certainly not. The four- and five-star hotels of the world have created their own generic breed of restaurant: *the sort that* really could be anywhere. And indeed, Le Jardin epitomises this banality, in both its food and its decor. Nothing one could actually dislike or complain about, but there again, nothing one would recommend or wish to return to. The mirrored faux arches have centre sections of salmon pink. The chairs are of hardwood and are low slung. It is spotlessly clean, the ashtray being incongruous in its gleaming surroundings, and the menu seems reasonable, if a mite pricey.

We scanned the selections of sandwiches and burgers, encountering en route an outlandish vegetarian selection, promising Squash à la King amongst others. I decided to partake of the "Classic Cheese Burger", persuaded by the "High Protein!" tag line on the menu. I thought perhaps it would be health giving. Health giving *I'm afraid it wasn't*, tasting more than vaguely like *kofta* and being rather chewy. The large sesame bun it came in was fresh and delicious, from the hotel's rightly renowned bakery outlet. The fries, unfortunately, were refries. One can always tell that this practice has been performed when the said fries do not seem to have come from a potato at all, but are crisp little airy shells, full of white fluff. The Baron Sandwich was rather better, a mysterious mixture of veal, tuna, eggs, tomatoes and garlic in a baguette. It, too, appeared in one of the scrumptious sesame rolls, which had been sectioned and crafted to look like a sliced baguette. The sandwich was proclaimed "fine" by my companion, who refused to say more, lest I quote him out of context. Neither dish, I must point out, was *poorly put together or presented: my* gripe is the "averageness" of the whole affair.

The food was accompanied by rather sloppy service. It was some time before menus were proffered, our orders were recorded on a napkin, our waiter walked off before we had a chance to order our drinks. The drinks were rather good, however: extremely freshly squeezed orange juice, chilled and served in long stemmed glasses with a wedge of fruit. Needless to say, our fellow diners consisted, in general, of posses of hotel guests. Indeed, I don't suppose Le Jardin is primarily a public outlet, but this does not excuse the fact that it left me feeling as though I hadn't really got what I'd paid for. And that's always infuriating. Four out of ten, then, to this outlet, with further advice to try a bit harder. A very average lunch, with two orange juices and a dirty ashtray: LE65.

Café Le Jardin, at the Baron Hotel, 8 Mahad El-Sahara Street, Behind the Baron Palace, Heliopolis.
Tel.: 2915757

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

Across

1. Weather directions (4)
5. Good quality; holding (5)
10. Head cover (3)
13. Similar (5)
14. Grinder (5)
15. Item (3)
16. Limited in space, time and character (11)
18. Egg-flip (3)
19. Presumed; procured (7)
20. Used to disperse mobs (7)
22. Office employees (6)
23. Wild drinking spree (6)
24. Escort (5)
26. Praises (5)
29. Paid notices (3)
32. Hebrew name for Apostle Paul (4)
33. lament (6)
34. Kipling's "If " or "Blake's "Tiger" (4)
36. Leprechaun or pixie (5)
38. Qur'anic chapter (4)
39. Dictate; burden; obtrude (6)
41. A patched up article (4)
43. Segment, abb. (3)
44. Way in which something is organised, hyph. wds (5)
45. Tell another fabrication (5)
46. Dodged (6)
48. Plunder, vandalism (6)
53. Dominate; rule the roost (7)
55. Rest; superfluity (7)
56. Eggs (3)
57. Citizen of Port of Spain (11)
59. By (3)
60. Remove errors and corruption (5)
61. Inert gas, pl. (5)
62. Make an effort (3)
63. Eyres, jumbled (5)
64. Fling (4)

Down

1. Hail melting while falling (5)
2. Saltpeter (5)
3. Loosely-coiled bundle of yarn (5)
4. Excited (7)
5. Surrounded by (4)
6. Heir (3)
7. Woodlouse; roofer (6)
8. Dined (5)
9. Lever imparting motion to a machine (7)
10. Fitting (9)
11. Deer-like buffalo (4)
12. Dowel pins (4)
13. Totals (4)
17. Communiqué; memo (7)
21. Paper measures (5)
23. Romeo; treasured (7)
25. Attila the ... (3)
27. Meet defiantly (4)
28. Obstacle; drawback (4)
29. Sacred bull of ancient Egyptians (4)
30. Rotunda (4)
31. On the basis of seven (9)
33. Covered with mud (7)
35. Shed feathers (5)
37. ...de mer (3)
40. Sprayer (7)
42. Countryman; tiller of the soil (7)
45. Depends (6)
47. Golf term denoting "unbeatable" (5)
49. Process of recording visual images (5)
50. Spanish goodbye (5)
51. Pheasant-like bird, pl. (5)
52. Weather directions (4)
53. One Egyptian (4)
54. Above (4)
55. Mount (4)
58. Weather directions (2)

Last week's solution

The battle of the crocodiles

The real crocs may have learned to prefer the High Dam and left the river behind, but Nashwa Abdel-Tawab finds there are still plenty of young men and women ready to take their place during the annual Nile marathon

If you run a marathon on hard ground, you may be safe, you may get to see some nice scenery, but you arrive home with sore feet and drenched in sweat. On the other hand, if you swim a marathon, you get the tan you always wanted, no sweat, strong arms but no blisters. And if you *should* get into any kind of trouble, there'll be a motor launch not too far away to help you with your problem — whether you need new elastic for your trunks or have to be hauled out onto a stretcher. In either case, you'll need to be skinny, slim or (at worst) slender. Short-distance swimmers may have bulky bodies, but once you're in water light weight equals strong. If you have fat to work off, you should do it before the race begins.

Everywhere except Egypt, aquatic marathons and World Championships take place in seas and lakes, where your body will float easily on the water and you don't have to exert much effort to propel yourself forwards. But in Egypt, the swimmers haven't yet followed the crocodiles to Lake Nasser, and their hunting ground is still the Nile. The Father of rivers isn't an easy ride — even floating can't be taken for granted. And then on top of that, there's quite a current.

This year's Nile Marathon followed a different route from all 17 previous races (the tradition dates back to 1951), sending the swimmers round the island of Zamalek three times, for a total distance of 30km. "This route makes it harder for the swimmer, who has to swim half the distance of each round against the current," said Mounir Sabri, President of the Egyptian Long Distance Swimming Federation. "When you're going against the current, you can swim seven strokes and still find yourself back exactly where you started," added Ayman Saad, Secretary-General of the Federation and manager of the marathon.

Once the swimmers are in the water, everything is allowed; pushing, kicking, indeed any kind of dirty work. Both the swimmers and their coaches subscribe to Machiavelli's theory that the end justifies the means. The coaches' boats will deliberately make waves to hinder rival swimmers behind and at the same time give a push to their swimmer in front. Judges have tried to put an end to such behaviour in the past, but to no avail. Moreover, when going against the current the swimmers leave the centre of the river and cluster beside the banks, where the current offers less resistance — and where their misdeeds are more likely to go unnoticed.

33 swimmers from 13 countries, including nine Egyptians, took part in the 18th Nile International Long Distance Swimming Marathon. There were eight entrants in the women's section. The total prize money on offer was $25,000. First place for both men and women was worth $5,500.

The winner, in five hours and 15 minutes, was former champion David Medina, 23, from Spain, who finished strongly and with no sign of fatigue or other ill effects, as is so common. Medina, ranked no. 1 in the world, is probaby the fastest long distance swimmer alive today. "I didn't get to sleep until 5am because I was waiting for my luggage from the airport, and I only slept for two hours," said Medina, "but I still managed to win the title for a second time. I like this race, especially this year because it's harder, it's a real challenge. You have to delve into your hidden powers."

This was the first time Medina had swum this race against the current, and amazingly he finished in the same time as last year. "This means I must have improved my style since last year," he explained with a smile. He has taken part in seven international races this year, and won them all, and now has three World Championships to his name. He studies at film school in the USA, but he continues to swim because he's afraid that if he stops, he may put on weight.

His arch-rival of the last two years, Nicolas Knap from France, came to Cairo in the hope of beating Medina, but he was disappointed, finishing five minutes behind the champion. Nicolas is ranked no. 2 in the world. He led in the first two rounds, then in the third simply couldn't match Madina's strength against the current. But the fight between the two is not over yet: they will meet again next January in the World Championships in Australia.

Four swimmers — the Egyptian Riham Hani Mostafa and three Macedonians — had to quit the race after the first round, either because they were sick from drinking in Nile water or because they were exhausted by the strength of the current.

One group of competitors particularly caught the spectators' attention — the Malaa family from Syria. The three brothers, Fras, Mousab and Hammam, their sister, Rodaina, and their cousin, Lobna Malaa, were taking part in the race for the second time, except for Fras who was clocking up his third Nile marathon. They are much admired by those who follow the sport for their passion and commitment. They are talented swimmers too: Fras took third place, Mousab fifth, Hammam sixth, and Lobna was first among the women, followed by Rodaina. Their coach, Khalil Hassan, has entered them for seven international races this year, and each time they managed to come somewhere between third and sixth place. This was Lobna's second Nile marathon title. However, the way to success is not always plain sailing: three days before the race, Fras was injured in training when he cut his arm on a piece of iron. A doctor advised him to withdraw from the race, but he refused, saying: "I can't. I drank from the Nile once, and now I must go back."

The Egyptian spectators applauded the Malaa family as if they were not just Arabs, but Egyptians themselves, for they triumphed where the Egyptian swimmers failed. The highest-placed Egyptian, Ahmed El-Ghitani, came eighth, followed by Sherif Kamal in 10th place. "It was a very tough competition, with a lot of the world's best-ranked swimmers taking part," said El-Ghitani sadly.

Another competitor who fascinated the crowd was Maria Anis Matta from Argentina. Before jumping into the water, the spectators were amazed to see her taking off her artificial right leg. "I dreamt of coming to Egypt to swim in the Nile, the Father of the rivers," said Maria, "but it was so much harder than the English Channel which I crossed on 25 August. The English Channel was cold but it's okay; the Nile may be warm, but it's a much harder swim, especially against the current. To compete in a Nile marathon, you have to be really strong over long distances." Maria quit the race after two rounds (four hours and 30 minutes) because her arms were aching and she had vomitted twice: "I tried to endure the pain, but after the second round it was just too much. I'll have to train even harder now for next year." Maria, 32, is the South American Long Distance Champion. She had a car accident when she was four years old and took up swimming two years after her accident. She started with short distance, but later shifted to concentrate on long distance races, which she finds more satisfying.

The Nile may be a challenge, but it is also a trial, and for some competitors must resemble a nightmare. The banks are filthy, littered as they are with pieces of iron, cans, branches and leaves, and oil from the boats. Those swimmers who are lucky enough to escape injury invariably emerge covered with a thick layer of oil. On one memorable occasion in the late 1980s, a women swimmer found herself entangled in a donkey's stomach that was floating down the river. She couldn't eat for two weeks afterwards out of disgust. It may not be as bad as it used to be, but it's still pretty bad, as the competitors find out again each year. Moreover, the river is full of bilharzia, though these are less of a hazard to a fast-moving marathon swimmer. "Swimmers don't catch bilharzia because they are moving all the time and their feet don't touch the ground," said Nasser El-Shazli, a member of the Egyptian Federation and a former champion. "Even so, we give them tablets to take as a precaution. But the risk of bilharzia is really zero, no swimmer I know of has ever caught it."

Bibo against racism

THE FAMOUS Egyptian footballer, Mahmoud El-Khatib, has been invited to take part in an all-star football tournament against racism. Abeer Anwar got the details from the man known as "Bibo"

1997 is European Year against Racism. Throughout this year, events are being organised all across the continent to mobilise people in the fight against racism and xenophobia.

As part of these events, the International Association of Professional Footballers (AIFP) in association with the European Commission and under the patronage of Commissioner Padraig Flynn, is organising an all-star football tournament against racism to be held in Madrid on 12 October. The sole representative of the Middle East, and the first footballer from the region ever to take part in such an event, will be Egypt's Mahmoud El-Khatib. "Bibo", the "magician" of the Egyptian game, has a long and glorious career behind him, both with Ahli and with the Egyptian national team. Yet he was still delighted to receive such a prestigious invitation: "I am very honoured to be chosen by the AIFP to help in the fight against racism," he said.

Bibo drew attention to the persistence of racism in the Middle East, and particularly in relation to the Palestinians who are still denied the right to their own country despite an international decision in their favour by the UN as long ago as 1947. He added: "All religions forbid what is happening in Palestine. There should be a united stand by all the Arab countries against such racism, as it does not concern only one country, but all Arabs."

In Madrid, Bibo will be playing alongside great stars of an earlier generation — Pele, Di Stefano, Puskas, Platini, Cruyff, Bechenbauer, Lineker, Madjer, Milla, Ardiles and Kempes — as well as with younger players who have made their reputations in the 1980s and 90s, such as George Weah, Rai, Kanu, Maradona, Romario, Cantona, Raul and Ronaldo.

The AIFP was created on 18 September 1995 by fourteen players, including Cantona, Rai, Chaouch, Abedi, Pele, Weah, Vialli, Ferrara, and Prudhomme. Its president is Maradona, and Didier Roustan is executive director.

The aims of the AIFP are to defend the interests of players, to offer assistance with humanitarian actions, and to promote and protect the sport of football. Thanks to the AIFP, football players have at last an opportunity to come together and speak with a single voice on issues of vital importance to them.

The tournament will take place at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium on 12 October at 6.30pm. There will be three all-star teams, captained by Diego Maradona, George Weah and Eric Cantona. Each match will last 40 minutes, and the event will be broadcast live throughout the world.

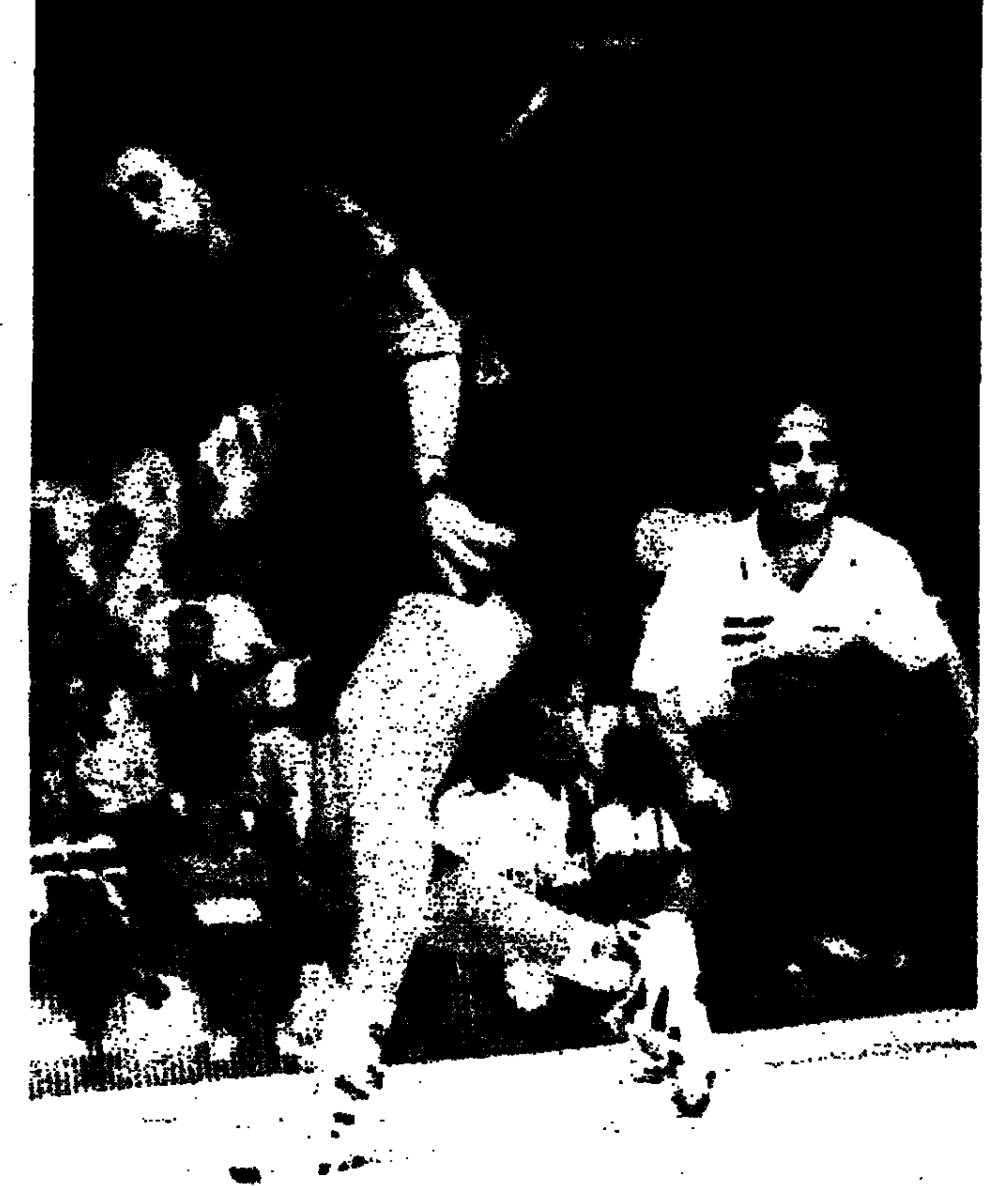


photo: Salah Ibrahim

UNDER the aegis of President Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's International Squash Championship will open tomorrow at the Alexandria Stadium indoor complex, Eman Abdel-Moeti reports.
President of the Egyptian Squash Federation Hossam Nasser said at a press conference held last Sunday that President Hosni Mubarak has agreed to act as guardian angel to the first Egyptian International Squash Championship which will run from 10 to 17 October. The first two days of qualifying matches will be played at the Sporting Club in Alexandria. After a day's rest, the first and second rounds of the main draw will be fought out at the Cairo Squash Complex. From the quarter finals on, the matches will be played at the Alexandria Stadium indoor complex in portable glass courts. The total prize money for the championship is $100,000, making it the biggest international championship recognised by the World Professional Association. Nasser thanked Minister of Information Safwat El-Sherif for having the matches broadcast live, Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui for arranging sight-seeing tours for the players, and Executive President of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports Abdel-Moneim Emara for his constant support during the preparations.

Volleyball revival

After a difficult period, Egyptian volleyball this week witnessed a stirring revival, crowned by the country's qualification for the World Championship. Abeer Anwar reports

It is an unprecedented achievement: Egypt's national volleyball team have qualified to take their place in the World Volleyball Championships. They beat both Nigeria and Cameroon 3-0 in the fifth round of the African Region qualifiers held in Kanu, Nigeria. This result is even more remarkable when one considers the team's recent past. After they were stripped of their gold medal in the Arab Games due to drugs offences, morale had reached an all-time low. Winning the medal by beating Algeria 3-0 had been a great achievement in itself, so its subsequent loss was all the more traumatic.

It's a long time now since Egypt was a true leader among the Arab and African nations in this sport. Only last summer they had endured the humiliation of coming fourth in the Arab Championships, which were won by Algeria. "The players have been through hard times this season," said Mahmoud Farag, the national team's technical manager. "I had to do my best, not only to train them, but even more importantly, to restore their confidence."

The team then had another shock when the Egyptian Volleyball Federation (EVF) cancelled their training camp in the Czech Republic so as to cut down on expenses. As a result many of the team's players did not get enough training, since their own clubs — for the majority, Ahli and Zamalek — had cancelled their training camps too.

But in spite of these difficulties, the players and their managers were keen to qualify and thus avenge the humiliation of being stripped of their medal. They gave an excellent performance which impressed both the local fans and the head coaches of the other teams. Hamdi El-Safi, one of Egypt's best players, impressed everyone by his great courage in surmounting his grief at his father's recent death in order to take part, and he was on excellent form as usual. By chance, Liberia withdrew from the African qualifying rounds at the last minute, making it easier for those who were left. This is the first year that independent qualifying rounds, quite separate from the Regional Nations Championships, have been held, under the International Volleyball Federation's new system.

Throughout Egypt's second match with Cameroon, the team had the warm support of the Nigerian fans. Although there were four professional players in the Cameroon team and seven in the Nigerian team, the wholly amateur Egyptian team were able to teach both countries a lesson. The Nigerian press was full of praise for the bravery and talent of the Egyptian team. Captain and play-maker, Maged Mustafa, was nicknamed "the magician" by the local fans, for the way his signals to the team during the match seemed to lead infallibly to victory.

The Nigerian technical manager, Tommio Goma, tried to explain his team's crushing defeat by saying that his players "lacked a sense of belonging. Most of them are professionals, they play for other teams and only came together for this event. They asked for $13,000 as their fee for participating in the qualifying rounds! I envy the way the Egyptian team play as one man."

The Egyptian team had a dual mission in Nigeria, travelling on from Kanu to Lagos, the capital, where they were taking part in the African Nations Championship. There they were placed in group B, along with Tunisia, South Africa and Cameroon. Group A comprised the host nation Nigeria, Algeria, Botswana and Senegal.

The Egyptians started out with the same enthusiasm they had shown in the qualifying rounds, beating last year's title-holders Tunisia 3-2, in an exciting match that lasted 3 hours. Egypt played a tight game, overcoming early set backs to take the lead in the second set. But before long stress, bad accommodation and the constant pressure to succeed began to take their toll. To everyone's astonishment, even their own, they went on to lose 3-0 to Cameroon. "It's the same team that we beat 3-0 three days ago. I don't know what happened to the players," Mohamed Lakani, the Egyptian coach, commented. But perhaps the defeat was not so difficult to explain. The players were completely exhausted, especially the Ahli players who had also been taking part in the African Clubs League Winners' Championship: they had been playing championship-level volleyball continuously for over a month. In spite of this setback, the players were able to reorganise themselves in time to beat South Africa 3-0, but it was too late. Egypt was knocked out due to a one set difference between them and Tunisia and Cameroon. "I think the players were over-confident after beating Tunisia, who were the title-holders, in the opening match of the championship," said Sayed Eisaa, head of the Egyptian delegation. "They relaxed in the next match and all it took was the loss of one set to put an end to our dreams."

Farag added: "Our qualification for the World Championship in Japan in February '98 and our 3-2 victory over Tunisia is a revival that we did not expect, least of all under these conditions."

Meanwhile, Ahli carried off the African Clubs League Winners' Championship which was held in Dakar. Ahli were the defending title-holders and, for the first time, the only representative of Egypt. Nine teams from across the African continent came to try and unseat the reigning champions.

Having reached the semi-finals, Ahli found themselves pitted against the Nigerians of Giwaga. Throughout the 79-minute game, Nigerian and Senegalese fans combined to try and intimidate the Egyptian team. Yet despite their efforts, Ahli dominated the game throughout, winning the first two rounds 15-3 and 15-5 against opponents who put up virtually no resistance. Ahli went on to win the match 3-0 and qualify for the finals, where they had to take on Mawlodia of Algeria. 10,000 fans packed into the Dakar Stadium to see this showdown. The Algerians have some of the tallest players in Africa, but did not try to take advantage of this by putting up a blank-wall defence. Ahli won the game 3-1, and thus became the first team to win both the African Cup Winners' Cup and the League Winners' Championship in the same season. The "red devils" also collected awards for best play maker — Maged Mustafa — and best player — Ayman Roshdi, who is also the tallest player in Africa. In recognition of their great achievement, Adli El-Qui, manager of the Ahli club, generously doubled the players' winning bonus.

Not all the news was good news, however. Hani Meselhi, Ahli's captain, is facing a six-month suspension by the Egyptian National Committee as punishment for taking drugs during the Arab Games in Lebanon last September. "I was tested negative in the second analysis by the Egyptian Federation in Germany, so why am I being punished for something I haven't done?" Meselhi asked. However Dr Amr Elwani, head of the EVF, has been informed by Mrs Lamis Heider, head of the Lebanese Supreme Council for Sports, that Egypt have been officially demoted to second place in the last Arab Games, after the team captain was accused of taking drugs. The gold medal has been given instead to Algeria. She explained that the Games' organisers decided to show lenience because Meselhi tested positive only for the final match, and not for the earlier matches.

Yet Elwani remains adamant that the outlook is bright, even after the confirmation of this blow. "Despite all that, Egyptian volleyball is taking great steps towards reviving its supremacy among the African and Arab countries, after a long time lying dormant," he concluded.

Bowled off their feet

Two years ago, there was nowhere to go bowling in Cairo. This year, from 15 to 22 November, Egypt will be hosting the World Bowling Cup. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports on how times have changed

The head of the newly-formed Egyptian Bowling Federation, Major-General Hanafi Riad, and the chair of the championship's organising committee, Amr Kamel, held a joint press conference last Friday to announce the details of the World Bowling Cup for men and women individuals. According to Amr Kamel, who is also a member of the Promotion Committee of the World Bowling Federation: "We thought it would be good for Egypt to host a major championship like the World Cup, so as to promote the game and attract more players, rather than trying to create a wider base of support by setting up numerous bowling centres."

Bowling was introduced to Egypt only two years ago. There are seven bowling centers in Cairo, and a small number of players have formed teams and organise their own league competitions.

The Supreme Council for Youth and Sports together with the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of Tourism have agreed to sponsor part of the LE1,400,000 budget for the World Cup. The Ministry of Defence has shouldered the work of constructing the championship venue, the International Bowling Centre. The centre has 24 lanes, and is fully equipped with state-of-the-art technology. The Supreme Council for Youth and Sports will be responsible for the championship's opening ceremony, and the Ministry of Tourism has agreed to organise a day tour for all the players and officials attending the competition in Cairo.

The Egyptian side of the committee is working closely with the Bernard Gibbens Company, which has extensive experience of organising the World Bowling Cup championships. The head of the Bernard Gibbens organising committee and the company's executive secretary will be visiting Egypt next Saturday to inspect the progress made with the preparations.

Next Saturday also will witness the Egyptian qualifying competition to select the two players — one man, one woman — who will represent the country in the championship. Since last May, the Egyptian players have had the benefit of one of the best bowling coaches in the world. He has been recruited from the United Arab Emirates, where he coached one of their players to win the 1989 World Cup. He was also behind the victory of a Qatari player who won the World Cup in 1988. However, even with his assistance, there is no guarantee that any of the Egyptian players will make it to the final.

In the final competition there will be competitors representing 81 different countries, but the number of women who are to take part is not yet known, and Egypt may well be the only Arab country to be represented in the women's event. Overall, the number of participating countries this year is unprecedented: there were only 57 nations in the 1995 World Cup in Brazil, compared to 71 in the Ireland World Cup in 1996. In Ireland, 54 women participated, and Egypt was represented by Sherin El-Gohary in the women's event, and Ahmed Khatab in the men's.

Last year, Egypt was not yet a member of the World Bowling Federation, and was able to participate in the World Cup only by invitation. This year, however, Egypt was able to establish its own affiliate federation in June, thus securing a place in the competition by right. The current federation is only a provisional structure; a permanent organisation will be set up by a general assembly to be held some time next year.

Amr Kamel managed to obtain the Federation's approval to make slight modifications in the championship rules. Thus, instead of a five-player ladder final, it will be only a three-player ladder: this will reduce the duration of the final session from around four hours to about two hours, including the men's and women's finals and the distribution of the trophies. "This will make it easier for television to broadcast the finals live without the risk of boring the viewers," said Kamel. Another innovation is that for the first time there will be a day's break after the qualifying rounds. Kamel said that players and officials will use this day for sightseeing around Cairo, as guests of the Ministry of Tourism.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

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photo: Randa Shaath

Mohamed Hamam:

One more new beginning... old Nubia is gone, but the songs remain

The best way to say it

"In a foreign country I am an Arab, with Arabs I am an Egyptian and in Egypt I become Nubian. I am all these things at once, of course." He has travelled a great deal, but has always been careful to retain his identity — or identities. He is one of the few Nubian singers whose talent has flourished while remaining faithful to an authentic Nubian sound. "My mother used to sing to me when I was a child. I adored my mother and I loved her voice. I was always happy to hum along."

He has only one recording of his mother singing, the beauty of her voice clear although the quality of the recording is poor. It is one of his favourite songs: "Give me back my son, I want him to return with his head raised higher than the voice of the Basharyia."

The Basharyia, explains Mohamed Hamam, are a desert tribe. Their voices, like those of all nomads, are said to be higher than villagers' because the sound has to travel through vast expanses when they address each other. "This means that the mother wanted her son to come back to his village with his head held up in pride."

"His voice," says a friend who does not tire of listening to his songs, "is like no other. There are a couple of good Nubian singers, but none of them have the power to move their listeners like Hamam's does. His voice has depth but it also has width. It is like a large bed made for comfort. You listen and the voice caresses and reassures and encourages, the way a mother's love caresses and reassures and encourages a dear son. It is sad yet hopeful; it is full of sorrow, yet underneath, it announces the return of joyful days."

Hamam's words are always simple, words spoken for a child, or for love or sorrow, stirring very basic yearnings. His songs are about palm trees which grow roots in the soil of sun-warmed lands, caring women, houses where one takes refuge, or which one abandons, and the words of his mother, who is dead and whom he misses so much that his voice could break. The grief for a land which has disappeared, for a freedom lost during long years in prison are heard in counterpoint, but then the voice soars and a brighter future suddenly beckons. His melodies are entwined around a rhythm often reminiscent of dock-workers' old songs, or of those one imagines boatmen must have sung thousands of years ago, sailing on the Nile. According to Hamam, however, many of the greatest Nubian folkloric songs — like most folklore the world over, he says — are too sexually explicit to appeal to a wide urban audience.

Unlike today's top singers, Hamam is not prolific with his recordings: few tapes and no CDs of his are sold in music shops. His production yields a dozen Nubian songs, perhaps, and another dozen drawn from Upper Egyptian folklore, his famous song about the houses of Suez, the one about his mother and a couple of title tracks for popular TV serials. Nor is he particularly anxious to increase his musical activity. "I sing for my pleasure and for my friends," he says; "I sing when I have something to say and singing seems the best way to say it."

Mohamed Hamam was born in Boulaq Abul-Ela sixty-something years ago, and some of his earlier memories are of incursions into nearby Zamalek. "There was a bit of open ground extending from the Andalusian Gardens where I used to go with friends from school, after we had gone to the movies. We went there to re-enact scenes that we particularly liked in the film we had just seen. I liked playing Zorro." Having exhausted this pleasure, he usually went to visit a relative who worked as a cook in one of the houses near the Gezira Sporting Club, in the hope that he would give him a few piastres with which to finance his next visit to the cinema. Although he was a city boy, he did not feel that Zamalek was his part of town, and was careful not to break any rules. Whenever he saw a "No Parking" sign, he would tear down the street as fast as his legs could take him. On the street where his relative worked, there was a "No Left Turn" sign. "I found this particular one extremely frustrating. By taking a left turn, I could reach the house immediately, but instead, I always went around, taking right turns all the way. It would take me an hour."

By the time he enrolled in the Faculty of Fine Arts, one imagines, he had stopped believing that all traffic signs applied to pedestrians. There he studied architecture and decoration, but already, while at school, he had been obsessed with politics. He wanted independence from the British and joined a students' group — "one that was rather radical," he chuckles. Hamam's politics have always been party politics, and emphatically left-wing. His political career included a stint with the Polisario in the '70s and has probably been the major reason why he never managed to get his singing career on the fast track. He was either in jail or in other countries: France, Tunisia — where he discovered the *Sira Hilaliyya* — then Algeria and five years with the Polisario; then France again, many times.

"So there I was, a young revolutionary, barely in my late teens; and yet, you won't believe this, but I had a soft spot for King Farouk and Mustafa El-Nahhas," he says. He still keeps a *tarboush* which El-Nahhas gave him when he was a child, and fondly remembers the day when he received this present. His father was a *rais* on the Mahassen, the yacht reserved for the use of Egyptian prime ministers. El-Nahhas was the only one of them to love the yacht and, whenever the Wafd won the elections and he returned to power, he would move almost overnight to the Mahassen, which was moored opposite his residence.

On one such occasion, Hamam went looking for his father on the yacht. "Suddenly, I found myself standing in the middle of a group of women all dressed in black. Someone had died in Zeinab El-Wakil's [El-Nahhas's wife] family, and I had arrived in the middle of the condolences. I was terribly intimidated and tried to run away, but I found El-Nahhas standing in my way. He patted me on the head and, at this moment, my father, informed of my presence among the women, arrived. El-Nahhas wouldn't let him take me away, but ordered a servant to bring a *tarboush*, which he gave me. I still have it at home. I used to play football with those my father bought me, but this one I treasure to this day."

His love for the king did not prevent him from carrying on his political activities and, in 1959, seven years after the Free Officers led by Nasser had overthrown the monarchy, he was caught. He went to jail on two occasions, once condemned to five years' hard labour, but, he says, those years were not wasted. "I learned so much more in prison than I would have on the outside. And I learned faster. I had plenty of time to think and I read a lot. I also started singing in jail. I realised I knew all the songs from my childhood. Whenever I felt despair, I would sing. It was my way of coping. Many prisoners broke down completely, but me — I sang. I noticed at once that my songs gave courage to my companions."

He sang the songs his mother used to sing to him, some Nubian, some from Upper Egypt. Hamam's family belongs to the Kunuz tribe, and he sang the songs, popular among the Kunuz, which he had heard so often in his childhood. "My mother used to sing for me when she came to visit me in prison, and it gave me peace. When she was gone, repeating the words and remembering her voice, I always felt better." The guards used to tell his mother that, if she made him sign a paper, he would walk out a free man, but she always refused, he says proudly. "My son has honour," she used to say. "When his time comes, he will walk out with his head held high — higher than the voice of the Basharyia..."

Hamam loved his mother passionately, and is not yet ready to accept her death. The daughter of the village *umda*, she had been taught to read and write — unlike his father — and it is from her that he inherited his interest in literature and politics. She was a strong woman who understood and supported her son. Disobeying her husband, she allowed Hamam to smoke and drink, often supplying him with liquor and cigarettes — which she would toss at him, scolding: "Go on, if you have to smoke and drink, go ahead." The father had to give in to his wife. He had chosen her against his own father's will, running away from home when his family opposed his choice. After he finally managed to marry her, he seldom opposed her.

In jail, Hamam's voice was "discovered" by Hassan Fouad, later the famous editor-in-chief of *Sabah El-Kheir*. "He always looked out for me," says Hamam, "and encouraged me to sing." Fouad promised him that, once they were released, he would make Hamam famous. Hassan Fouad left first, but Hamam was eventually to catch up with him and, true to his word, Fouad found him a place in television.

"It was after I had gone to Nubia. Tharwat Okasha had organised a trip up the Nile with many of the most famous Egyptian artists and commissioned them to record images of Nubia before it was flooded. I went to Nubia and did a few sketches of my own. Hassan Fouad arranged for me to appear on television with Abdel-Ghani Abul-Enein in a programme called *El-Fann wal-Hayat* (Art and Life). Abul-Enein showed his paintings of Nubia, I showed my sketches, I recited a few verses, then sang *Ya Amm Ya Jammal* for the first time. It was to become one of my most famous songs." Maybe one other reason why Hamam failed to shine as brightly as many stars of lesser magnitude is that his artistic debuts were unorthodox: other popular singers of the time gained their mass appeal through radio.

Released from jail, Hamam hastened to resume his studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts. He wanted a real career which would allow him to earn a living. A little later, he was invited to appear on another talk show, *Sherit Tasgil*, which heralded the beginning of a serious singing career. He began to work with Mohamed El-Mougi and produced several tracks for television serials. Typically, long after the serials have been forgotten, people remember the songs and ask for them whenever he appears in live concerts.

Hamam likes his audience. He feels close to the people who come to listen, and one of his greatest pleasures is doing the Ramadan concerts. "I rent a bus and, with my troupe, we tour the governorates and the small villages. I feel so proud when we attract a crowd," he says.

At various times, he has also enjoyed working for the cinema, sometimes as an actor, or as a set designer. "I go wherever the wind takes me," he says, "and I only stay when I am pleased with what I am doing." Pleasure in his work has always been of the essence, whether he is organising a political meeting, building houses in Algeria and schools in the Tenth of Ramadan City, singing at El-Ghouri or rearranging the set at Studio Galal.

Five years ago, he had a serious car accident and was forced to slow down. With a bad leg, he moved to a ground-floor apartment in Maadi. He took it in his stride, including the eighteen steel pins which keep his thigh together. "Now, I have my small garden and I have many ideas to complete the decoration of my flat. I am also working on a new project..." He picks a small green fruit off the ground. "Look, a lemon," he says, tilting his head to observe the tree. "They are starting to ripen..." The thought makes him smile. "There are always new beginnings."

Profile by **Fayza Hassan**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♠ My friend Ambassador **Raouf El-Ridi** never ceases to amaze me! Since he has taken charge of the Mubarak Public Library, it has become the venue of the most fascinating events and today he has once more managed to impress us with a three-day affair launched at the library in conjunction with the Goethe Institut Kairo on the occasion of the presentation of a trilingual documentation on the topic "Citizens' participation in the renovation of the old town of Cairo". There will be a lecture held by **Ahmed Abdou**, professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts, followed by a discussion in which **Klaus J Schultz**, an engineer from Munich, and **Herbert Kallmayer**, another engineer with the Supreme Building Authority of the Bavarian State Ministry of the Interior (both co-authors of the project with Dr **Abdou**), will take part. This will be followed by a workshop and a visit to spots and houses of the old town of Cairo.

♣ There is nothing more enchanting than Alexandria out of season. Such were my thoughts as I drove down to attend the annual party given by the AUC Alexandria Alumni Chapter. Held at Far 'n' Away (the ex-Au Privé), and organised by the very gracious and dynamic **Isis El-Mallakh**, the hugely successful event was a fund-raiser for various Alexandrian charities which **Mounir Doss**, an old hand at hotel management, expounded on at the dinner table. But having quaffed deep of a mysterious cocktail, my memory now fails me as to what it is all about. Still, knowing **Isis** and **Mounir**, I'm sure I missed out on some very interesting projects.

♥ These days it seems that many of my friends are distinguishing themselves in highly intellectual spheres. To start with, last Tuesday our very own political and social analyst **El-Sayed Yassin**, former director of Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, was being honoured for receiving the State Merit Award for Social Sciences, in an impressive reception hosted by the centre and attended by such a large number of important personalities that when I walked into the Panorama Room on the 12th floor of Al-Ahram Building, I was truly dazzled and you know dears how much it usually takes to impress yours truly. **Abdel-Moneim Said**, the present director for the centre, deputising for our Chairman of the Board and Chief Editor of *Al-Ahram* **Ibrahim Nafie**, read the main address while I kept smiling and nodding at friends and acquaintances. I spotted our Foreign Minister **Amr Moussa** first, then **Osama El-Baz**, political adviser to President Mubarak who was having a few words with our Minister of Social Affairs and Insurance **Mervat El-Tallawi**. Dr **Aleyeddin Hilal**, dean of the Faculty of Economics and Political Sciences, Cairo University, was also present and so were political analyst **Gamil Matar**, former Minister for Social Affairs **Ahmed Khalifa** and Ambassador **Taha El-Magdoub**, Al-Ahram's adviser for strategic affairs, as well as all the members of Al-Ahram's Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, among many other famous figures in the government and academia.



photo: Ayman Ibrahim



El-Sayed Yassin cutting the cake while Ahmed Khalifa, Mervat El-Talawi, Amr Moussa and Abdel-Moneim Said exchange pleasantries; (r) Fayza Hussein Heikal

♦ Another one of my good friends whose talent and merit was recognised is **Fayza Mohamed Hussein Heikal**, professor of Egyptology at AUC, who has been awarded the honorary professorship of College de France. **Fayza** has many good reasons to be proud of her rich career, which has combined academic achievements and field work.

♠ And darlings, let's end this chronicle by forgetting for a few minutes about intellectual tidbits (which are fine in small doses) and making a note on our calendar to attend Musical Encounter '97, where the Swiss group **Les Maniacs** will meet **Sharkiat Fathy Salama** in a concert at the Cairo Opera Small Hall on 20 October and at Gomhouria Theatre on the 22 October. See you there.